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**PARENTING IN SINGLE-CHILD FAMILIES AND THE WELL-BEING
OF ADOLESCENT ONLY-CHILDREN IN UK**

By

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**THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
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DECLARATION

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

ABSTRACT

Background and aim:

Households are decreasing in size with fewer children in developed countries. Nearly half of British families are classified as single-child families (SCF), showing a steady increase from the 1990s. Despite this, research on only-children in the UK is scant. The aim of this study was to explore parenting and the well-being of early adolescents in British single-child families.

Methodology:

Single-child families (31 adolescents, 47 mothers and 25 fathers) and multiple-children families (NSCF - 46 adolescents, 76 mothers and 31 fathers) completed online surveys on parenting and adolescent wellbeing. Using a mixed methods approach, 15 families with an only-child and 15 families with multiple children were also interviewed, and parent-adolescent interactions were observed using the Etch a Sketch (AMCIES). Interviews were analysed using thematic analysis.

Findings:

Survey data did not identify any relationship between family type and parenting. There were no significant differences between SCF and NSCF in observed parent-adolescent interactions except that only-children showed more task persistence/attention with mothers. Interview data found both family types were similar on themes such as using a child-centred approach, parental behavioural control and the absence of parental overindulgence. Parents of an only-child reported higher one-on-one parental involvement with their child, overprotective parenting and child-centredness but less authoritative and authoritarian parenting. Single-child families engaged more in permissive parenting and pampering of the child as well as pushy parenting. Both family types reported experiencing a positive parent-child relationship, however, closeness in parent-child relationship and high maternal support characterised the SCF more. Adolescent only-children reported a strong emotional connection only with their mothers and positive differences in parent-child relationships from being an only-child. Survey data revealed no association between parenting and adolescent wellbeing and family type, although adolescent only-children scored higher on self-compassion. Finally, adolescent only-children experienced as positive a relationship with their peers as adolescent non-only children and used friendship to cope with the only perceived disadvantage being an only child: loneliness.

Implications:

Parenting in single-child families is similar to parenting in multiple-children families although there are also sharp differences. Importantly, only-children seem to be more at an advantage than non-only children on both the parenting and wellbeing dimensions. Therefore, despite some differences in parenting across both family types, singletons do not fare any worse in terms of their wellbeing. Findings from this study strongly challenge negative stereotyping of single-child families.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SCF	SINGLE-CHILD FAMILIES
NSCF	NON-SINGLE-CHILD FAMILIES
OC	ONLY-CHILDREN
NOC	NON-ONLY CHILDREN
SP	SINGLE-PARENT
STF	STEP-FAMILY

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem statement

Parents often tell me that they feel their only-child status makes them feel like a failure in the eyes of others. Phrases like '*just the one*' aren't helpful and are often driven by society's belief that it is not ideal to have one child when really there's no evidence that growing up in a single-child family is any better or worse for children than growing up in a larger one. (Russell, 2013, p. 1)

The present study investigates only children¹ in the UK, their well-being, and their families with a specific focus on parenting. Although it is a topic which is widely discussed in layman's terms, empirical attention has not often been specifically given to only children and their relationships with their parents. Research on only-children began at the 1900s and mostly concentrated on studying how the absence of siblings could impact on their development (Falbo & Polit, 1986). Other studies investigated qualities that are specific to only children and differentiate them from other children, or explored the underlying socialisation practices. The experiences of emotional problems as well as the impact of having an only child on the parents, have also been studied (Ching, 1982; Makiyara, Nagoya, & Nakajima, 1985; Falbo & Polit, 1986; Poston & Falbo, 1990). Overall, a significant amount of existing research on only children focussed on understanding the characteristics of these children and mostly revolved around negative stereotypes; perhaps as a consequence of society not viewing one-child families as the norm. Having said that, there is also considerable empirical evidence indicating that onlies tend to be more successful in particular domains such as academic performance, verbal communication, general achievement and IQ (Reagan, 2008).

The mere reference to only children or only-child families links to the famous one-child policy in China whereby the government initiated a strict policy restricting families, mostly urban ones, to a single child (McLoughlin, 2005;

¹ An only child is also known as a single child, singleton, onlie, lone child or a child without siblings. In this thesis the term only children is predominantly used.

Wang & Fong, 2009). The following expansion in numbers of Chinese only children led to a great deal of research. For example, several studies assessed their mental health in comparison to their peers with siblings (e.g. Tao, 1998; Wang & Fong, 2009; Yang, Ollendick, Dong, Xia, & Lin, 1995). More recently, using interview data collected as part of the China Health and Nutrition Survey (CHNS; 2004), Short, Xu and Liu (2013) concluded that, overall, only children in China benefit in many ways. This is partly because they are more likely to have highly educated and wealthy parents. However, even after controlling for these advantages, it was found that only children participated more in formal extra school activities, adopted healthier eating habits, and also exercised more regularly.

A quantitative synthesis by Falbo and Hooper (2015) helped to provide a more updated insight into Chinese only children whereby only small advantages for only children in comparison to their counterparts were found regardless of the measures. As far as parenting Chinese only children is concerned, Lu and Chang (2013) reported that Chinese parents of only-children mostly use an authoritative parenting style. Furthermore their parenting approach and beliefs were mostly rooted in child-centeredness, warmth, and of an egalitarian nature. Chen, Liu, and Li (2000) also showed that the parenting styles adopted by Chinese mothers and fathers predicted different outcomes for their only child such as emotional and social adjustment as well as academic achievement. There has been some criticism levelled against early researchers on only children for inferring that existing findings are generalizable to all only children (Falbo & Poston, 1993). Therefore, the novel findings of the current research on British only children would bring a valuable contribution to existing literature in this area, which, so far, is mostly from China.

With specific reference to Britain, in the last two decades or so, while considerable emphasis has been placed on childlessness (e.g. Gillespie, 1999; McAllister & Clarke, 1998; Kiernan, 1989) relatively minimum attention has been paid to single-child families; a type of family rising in the UK. This lack of research was mainly attributed to this family type being *uncommon* in the UK at

the time (Jefferies, 2001, p. 2). Back in the 1990s some interesting comments were made about British only-child families:

If little is known about only children in Britain, even less is known about their families. We do not know who they are, how their situation has arisen (choice or necessity), how they feel about their status, what their family life is like, and in what way it differs, if at all, from that of families with more than one child (Laybourn, 1990, p. 393).

Although more than two decades elapsed since this quote was published, there are still significant gaps in knowledge in this area of family research. A lot of attention has been drawn to British families with an only child in newspaper articles such as *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* (e.g. 2018 as the most recent) but not much *empirical* attention has been given to them. Lay views are generally presented as negative. For example, ‘lay persons generally believe that parents of only children are inclined to overindulge and pamper their offspring which results in producing unhappy, selfish and disturbed individuals’ (Mottus, Indus, & Allik, 2008, p. 1047).

Nevertheless it has been speculated that parents who have only one child can benefit from emotional and social rewards, for instance, by promoting nurturing behaviour (Foster, 2000) and building social relationships (Schoen et al., 1997). Jefferies (2001) explained that parents of a lone child are usually in a better position to invest in their child’s upbringing and the child benefits from not having to compete with siblings to enjoy parental time. In addition, the parent benefits in terms of emotional satisfaction for their maximum input in the nurturing of their one and only child (Jefferies, 2001). Therefore it seems that parenting in one-child families could also lead to positive consequences for the families.

One of the very few research studies investigating parenting in single-child families in a developed country was conducted by Thomas-Johnson (2005) at a Master’s level, a quantitative comparison of parenting styles between 25 parents of an only child and 31 parents of more than one child in California. This study did not report any significant differences between the two groups. Another

quantitative study undertaken by Clarfield (1999) at a PhD level found that in comparison to first-borns, singletons were not any different on measures of behavioural control and parental involvement. No differences in terms of parental investment between one-child and multiple-children families challenges the commonly held assumption that singletons usually have stronger relationships with their parents (Dittrich, 2005).

Although multiple-children families were mostly perceived as the norm in previous decades (e.g. May, 1998 about American families) family researchers in the 1970s/80s noticed that the 'typical' family was now gradually changing into the one child family and some even stated that this was the family of the future (Hawke & Knox, 1977; Falbo, 1982). Indeed in the 21st century there seems to be an overriding shift to 'smaller families' – families with only one child; a phenomenon occurring in different countries around the world. Newspaper articles about only children including the experience of parents raising an only child have recently appeared in countries such as India (e.g. 2013) and New Zealand (e.g. 2012) with some research attention also drawn to the rise of one-child families in Iran as a consequence of the prevailing war situation between Iran and Iraq (Jamshidi, Afshar, & Rastgaran, 2013). As such, China is perhaps not the sole country with a large number of only children.

1.2 Statistics on families

1.2.1 Family size in the UK

Anderson (1998) as cited in a paper by Jefferies (2001), using data from the 1911 and 1946 censuses, revealed that between the marriage cohorts of 1870-79 and 1925, the average family size in UK dropped from 5.8 to 2.2 children while the percentage of marriages bearing only one child jumped from 5.3% to 25.2%. Only 13% of women born in 1935 formed a single-child family. When examining families who were least likely to have more children in England and Wales (i.e. people born in 1954), only 11% were single-child families (ONS, 2000).

Based on a comparison of family size distributions from eight European countries, Pearce, Cantisani and Laihonon (1999) reported that women born in

1955 and from the Republic of Ireland or England and Wales were the least likely to stop at only one child (10% and 12% respectively). Moreover it was more probable for women from England and Wales to remain childless (17%) than to only have one child (12%). Conversely, in France, Spain, Portugal and Denmark, the opposite trend is observed, whereby for instance, the percentage of French women having a single child was 20% while only 8% of them had no children. Even within the western societal context of Europe there are still differences with regards to attitudes towards one-child families perhaps relating to the marital or socio-economic situations of women across countries in Europe (Jefferies, 2001).

Looking back at the early 1990s, based on the responses of British citizens to the British Social Attitudes Survey in 1994, 75% of Britons indicated a clear preference for the two-child family (Jefferies, 2001). The *Daily Mail* newspaper in 2010 reported that homes with only children accounted for 46% of all families in the UK. Furthermore, a recent Labour Force Survey carried out by the Office For National Statistics (ONS, 2013) revealed that there are currently 3,616, 000 single children out of a total of 7,739,000 dependent children² (i.e. 47% of dependent children in the UK are classified as only children, 39% are from two-child families and 14% are from multiple-children families with more than two children) across different family types: married couple, cohabiting couple and lone-parent. The number of families with an only child aged 1-5 years is 1,519,000, with children aged 6-10 is 561,000 and more importantly, in relation to the current study, the number of families who have only one child in the age group of 11-14 is 575,000. In comparison to families with only children aged 1-10, those with young teenagers aged eleven and over are much more likely to remain only children. Families in the UK who had only one dependent child in the household rose progressively from 42 per cent in 2000 to 46 per cent in 2010.

Updated information on British families from the ONS (2015) reveals that there are currently 3,590,000 single-child families out of 7,926,000 families with dependent children (i.e. 45.3% of dependent children in the UK are *still* classified as only children since 2013, 40% are from two-child families and 14.7% are from

² Dependent children refer to 'those living with their parent(s) and either (a) aged under 16, or (b) aged 16 to 18 in full-time education, excluding children aged 16 to 18 who have a spouse, partner or child living in the household' (ONS, 2013, p. 7).

multiple-children families with more than two children). Furthermore, the average number of dependent children in families dropped from 1.81 in the 1990s to 1.79 in 2002, and subsequently to 1.74 in 2015 (ONS, 2015). Most recent updated statistics again point towards a trend for British families to shrink considerably. 55% of single-parent families along with 51% of cohabiting parents have a single child and in fact, 40% of married couples also have an only-child (ONS, 2017). This phenomenon is now seen as becoming the norm in current British society (as cited in The Guardian, 2018).

However, the above statistics are only snapshot figures and also reflect those families who, so far, have their first child but not yet their second. Therefore exact numbers of only-child families are very difficult to ascertain.

1.2.2 New global trends in family size

On a global level the average number of children is expected to drop to 1.0 per household in 2020 compared to 1.9 reported per household in 1980 (Euromonitor International, 2014). One-child families are gradually but increasingly becoming the norm in Southern Europe where 26% of Portuguese and 22% of Spanish women born in 1955 have a single-child family (Pearce, Cantisani, & Laihonon, 1999). In Europe in general, the average fertility rate in 2000 dropped from 1.72 in the 1990s to 1.46 in 2000. Even in Italy, a Catholic heartland in earlier times, the average family size was 1.18 children in 2000. Likewise, in Germany, women were found to have an average of 1.33 children in 2000. In Spain the birth rate astonishingly halved since the last 28 years to only 1.2 in the new millennium (McDonagh, 2001).

1.2.2.1 Reasons for the decline in family size

According to the United Nations (2007), the total fertility rate (TFR) of developing countries plunged from 6.0 births per woman in the late 1960s to only 2.9 in 2000 – 2005. Thus, low fertility in developed countries has been used to explain a rise in single-child families. For example, in France, a main reason for low fertility rates is the growth in single-child families rather than childlessness (Breton & Prioux, 2009). However, previous research by Laybourn (1994), Callan, (1985) and UKParents (2001) also revealed various reasons for the

decision of stopping at one child including unsuccessful conception or inability to carry a pregnancy to term, absence of a partner, a negative experience of pregnancy or childbirth, partner's decision not to have a second child, lack of support from the partner in terms of looking after the firstborn, stepchildren from the partner's previous relationship/s, difficulty in maintaining the work-family balance, little maternal instinct, seeing families with more children struggling to cope on different levels, and also, own personal satisfaction about having an only child with a greater chance of maximum input including a lot of attention. It has been previously observed that decisions regarding family size are even more difficult to make now since there are various alternatives to marriage and having children. Also, life-courses in general often have an unpredictable nature and above all, people are now the master of their own biographies – they make their own life choices as it suits them best (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995).

Holden (2003) drew attention to the growth of single-child families in relation to families' current social and economic situations. Wealth and social stability are important triggers for women to wait longer before having a child and this is often exacerbated for educated women in particular. Other reasons are secondary infertility following late childbearing, unplanned pregnancy and the unprecedented rise in divorce rates. According to Roberts, Williams and Buchanan (2013), expenses and inconveniences attached to childcare are also potential financial reasons accounting for falling fertility.

Families with married couples and those who are in a civil partnership without any dependent children are currently the most common family type in the UK with cohabiting families as the fastest growing type of family. Regarding the association between family type and number of children, 58% of single parents with dependent children have a single child, greater than the other two family types. Only 9% of lone parents with dependent children were headed by fathers. Conversely, only 40% of married couples fall into the category of one-child families and slightly less than 58% of opposite sex cohabiting families have only one child (ONS, 2013).

Importantly, despite the prevalence of one-child families in UK and Europe there remains a preference for a two-child ideal. These societies are

nevertheless witnessing a shift from two-child or multiple-children families to the one-child families (Sobotka & Beaujouan, 2014).

1.2.3 UK family size forecast

Jefferies (2001) acknowledged that family size is indeed continuously decreasing in the UK while also suggesting that there is uncertainty about whether this decrease will indicate a rise in childlessness or one-child families similar to some other European countries. Euromonitor International (2014) predicted that by 2020, Western Europe will have the lowest average number of children estimated at 0.5 per household highlighting a drastic and continuous drop in birth rates. From an economic perspective, Browne (2012) stated that families with children are facing an uneven burden since according to the finding of the Institute of Fiscal Studies, the median revenue among households with children is to undergo a sharp decline of 4.2% between 2010–11 and 2015–16. This amounts to a yearly reduction in income of £1,250 for a two-child family. Therefore based on this forecast, financial difficulties could also account for a further rise in single-child families in the UK.

An up-to-date picture of family size in the UK clearly shows a striking increase in single-child families. The unpopularity of one-child families in the UK in previous decades has now been mostly eradicated. In fact, “now, the only child is far less likely to grow up regarding themselves as, to put it mildly, different” (Clark, 2002, p. 1). Therefore current statistical evidence lays a very strong foundation for the importance of empirically investigating single-child families in the UK.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this research was to provide a first in-depth insight into the parenting styles and practices shown in the growing number of single-child families in the UK and their association with the developmental outcomes (well-being) of their adolescent children. The focus on this age group is to better understand how parents raise an only child who has just stepped out of childhood into the new phase of adolescence and is now adapting to the environment as a young teenager.

The perspective of both parents on their parenting and well-being of their child as well as the adolescent's own perspective on his/her parenting experience and well-being were explored. It is of absolute value for research on only children to tap into the subjective experiences of being a single child since these underlie the effects and challenges that only children themselves would be able to describe (Mancillas, 2006). Whilst some past studies have explored the perspective of adults as only children (e.g. Roberts & Blanton, 2001; Garcia, 2010; Schmid, 2007; Fletcher, 2014) research examining the perspective of adolescent only children is very thin. In line with the wide array of family research on parenting, the current study also explores the association between parenting and several moderator variables such as child gender, parent gender and family structure.

The remaining sections of this thesis are structured as follows: 1) a developmental perspective on parenting, 2) an overview of parent-child relationships and the well-being of adolescents, 3) existing research on only children, 4) the aims and objectives of the current study, 5) the methodological approach adopted in this study, 6) the research findings (presented in two chapters), and 7) discussion of the findings and conclusions.

CHAPTER II: A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE ON PARENTING

Raising and caring for children is one of the most important activities an adult will undertake (Rasmussen, 2014, p. 90).

It has long been established that parenting impacts the family as well as child outcomes (Maccoby, 1980). Psychologists often consider parenting to play a key role in children's growth and development (Magnuson & Duncan, 2004; Bornstein & Bradley 2003). More recently, Rasmussen (2014) drew attention to the importance of parenting in relation to the child's own well-being as well as the welfare of society extending from the family unit (on a micro level) to the wider community (on a macro level). As such, there is little doubt of the value of parenting research.

There are several theories and models pertaining to parenting. Of direct relevance to the current study are the family systems theory (Bowen, 1975; Kantor & Lehr, 1975) and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1989). The former posits that the family is to be viewed as a system; one which functions as a 'whole' and contributes towards a better understanding of family interaction while simultaneously giving due consideration to the 'parts' which are interconnected and influence the system (Bavelas & Segal, 1982). This theory would support the idea that sibling relationships (or the absence of them) can influence the parent-child relationship and vice-versa. Bavelas and Segal stated that this theory draws considerable attention to the importance of communication within the family as an 'open system' (p. 95). The main principles of the family systems theory revolve around "family dynamics, involving structures, roles, communication patterns, boundaries, and power relations" (Rothbaum, Rosen, Ujiie & Uchida, 2002, p. 329). Attachment theory emphasises different attachment patterns that a child can form with the parent which can broadly be defined as secure or insecure. Influenced by the work of Hooper (2007), attachment patterns and relational processes within the family are inter-related. Therefore, for the current study, it would be interesting to comprehend parent-child relationships in the absence of siblings from these perspectives.

Both the family systems theory and attachment theory converge on the idea that there are adaptive risks attached to mother-child relationships which are

often too close and characterised by over-involvement, high dependence, enmeshed and limited differentiation (Rothbaum et al., 2002). From an attachment theoretical stand point this is often referred to as the insecure-resistant attachment whereby parents are preoccupied by their child and the latter constantly seeks the presence of the parent as a secure base and can show signs of distress when separated (Marvin & Stewart, 1990 as cited in Rothbaum et al., 2002). Therefore, bearing in mind that single-child families do not have siblings as a 'part' of the family system, it is worth exploring the extent to which this impacts the mother-child relationship.

2.1 Conceptualisation

Parenting is multifaceted involving different types of behaviours that could operate individually or as a whole to influence child outcomes (Darling, 1999; Kordi & Baharudin, 2010). Specific parenting behaviours, for example, spanking or reading aloud can have an impact on child development, but focusing solely on individual parenting behaviours may be misleading (Darling, 1999). In early parenting research, the labels parenting styles and parenting practices were used interchangeably (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). However, Darling and Steinberg (1993) pointed out that it is essential to distinguish between parenting practices and parenting styles to have a better understanding of the socialization process. There are several studies that have distinguished between parenting styles and parenting practices in an attempt to treat parenting not as a global construct but one with underlying differential attitudinal and behavioural characteristics (e.g.s. Shek, 1998; Topham et al., 2011; Stewart, Bond, Abdullah, & Ma, 2000; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007; Stewart et al., 2000; Stewart et al., 2002; Padilla-Walker, Christensen, & Day, 2011).

2.1.1 Parenting style

Parenting styles refer to behaviours, attitudes, and values that influence the ways in which parents interact with their children (Mussen, 1983). Baumrind (1966) identified three parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative and permissive; further research by Lamborn et al. (1991) and Steinberg et al. (1994) added neglectful parenting (a derivative of permissive parenting). The classification of parents under these four distinct parenting styles is based on two

fundamental dimensions of parental support: parental responsiveness and parental demandingness (e.g. Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Baumrind, 1966). Responsiveness is conceptualised as the extent to which parents are sensitive in terms of promoting independence and self-assertion in their child as well as being supportive and accommodating. Responsiveness is characterised by parental warmth, autonomy support and parent-child dialogue. Demandingness refers to attempts made by parents in the form of behavior regulation, face-to-face confrontation, behavioral control and monitoring/supervision of the child's activities; all to assist the child in becoming an integrated member of society (Baumrind, 2005). Each of the four parenting styles is assessed according to the extent to which parents score high or low on parental demandingness and responsiveness (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Notably, parenting style is a typology and not a linear combination of responsiveness and demandingness. Although the ultimate objective of all parenting styles is to positively influence children's personality such that they are psychologically stable (Dabiri et al., 2012), evidence suggests that each parenting style leads to different child outcomes.

Parents who use the *authoritarian* style are extremely demanding and directive but not particularly responsive (Darling, 1999). They tend to exert a high level of control over their adolescents' behaviours as well as activities. They are also very strict, provide limited scope for negotiation and engage in minimum communication with their offspring (Mussen, 1983; Santrock, 2004). According to Darling (1999), authoritarian parents can be classified as non-authoritarian-directive (i.e. directive but not intrusive) or authoritarian-directive (i.e. highly intrusive). Adolescents brought up using this parenting style exhibit behaviours embedded in anxiety, engage in social comparison, struggle to initiate activities, and have poor social interaction skills (Santrock, 1990). They also tend to be unhappy, fearful, anxious with regards to comparing themselves with other people, and have difficulties communicating with other people (Santrock, 2004).

In contrast, *authoritative* parents are both demanding and responsive (Darling, 1999). They promote autonomy, display flexibility in their regulation of behaviours, rely on explanations instead of harsh punishment, engage in communication and support, and create a nurturing environment for their children

(Chan & Chan, 2005; Mussen, 1983; Baumrind, 1966). These parents are also power assertive (i.e. setting out clear directives) while simultaneously being autonomy supportive (i.e. promoting critical reflection and reasoning) (Baumrind, 1991; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Children of such parents are quite cheerful, self-controlled, autonomous, achievement-oriented, at ease making friends, comfortable cooperating with adults, and have good coping skills in stress-related situations (Santrock, 2004). With specific reference to autonomy granting during adolescence, previous research (Baumrind, 1991; Steinberg & Silk, 2002) confirmed a positive association between adolescent autonomy and authoritative parenting. Authoritative parenting also has a positive effect on adolescent lifestyles including healthy eating and abstinence from substance abuse (e.g. Kremers, Brug, De Vries, & Engels, 2003; Jackson, Henriksen, & Foshee, 1998; Radziszewska, Richardson, Dent, & Flay, 1996). Steinberg et al. (1994) reported less anti-social behaviours and fewer somatic symptoms among adolescents whose parents are classified as authoritative. Furthermore, Baumrind (1991) and Steinberg, Elmen and Mounts (1989) found that children of authoritative parents score relatively high on self-efficacy, self-discipline and emotional maturity.

Parents using the *permissive* parenting style are more responsive than demanding (Darling, 1999). They have very limited control over their adolescents and fail to support their children when it comes to making decisions (Chan & Chan, 2005). Nonetheless, permissive parents are also patient and display parental warmth including acceptance towards their child with minimum reliance on punishment. Moreover, these parents have minimum or virtually no expectation with regards to their child's behaviour and self-regulation (Hatami et al., 2011, as cited in Atighi, Atighi, & Atighi, 2015). Research has found that children exposed to this parenting style exhibit low self-control, social incompetence, an inability to be autonomous, low self-esteem, immaturity, and may distance themselves from the family (Mussen, 1983; Santrock, 2004).

Neglectful parents score low on both responsiveness and demandingness. These parents can also be rejecting of their child. Children and adolescents with uninvolved parents often have low ratings in different domains such as social competence, academic performance, psychosocial development and are rated high

on problem behaviour (Darling, 1999) as well as sexual promiscuity and substance abuse (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Steinberg, 1990). Also, neglectful parents are generally quite disengaged with minimum display of autonomy granting attitudes (Karavasilis, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 2003). Overall, there is accumulating evidence that authoritative parenting is the most optimal style, at least in North American and European samples (Fletcher, Steinberg, & Sellers, 1999; Baumrind, 1971; Lamborn et al., 1991; Radziszewska, Richardson, Dent, & Flay, 1996; Steinberg et al., 1994).

2.1.2 Parenting practices

In comparison to parenting style, parenting practices involve specific goals and specific content. This is to say that when parents use parenting practices, they are primarily concerned about influencing a specific aspect of the child (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Mize, Russell, & Pettit, 1998). Parenting practices are usually measured based on the following: parental involvement; parental monitoring; and parental goals, values, and aspirations (Spera, 2005). Parenting practices have been classified into proactive and reactive (Padilla-Walker, Christensen, & Day, 2011). Proactive parenting practices are characterised by parental support, praise, monitoring, and involvement. By contrast, reactive parenting mostly refers to parents' disciplinary approach to avoid future misconduct.

During adolescence, some studies report that parental involvement diminishes (Muller, 1998; Milgram & Toubiana, 1999) but it is unclear as to whether this decline applies to all parents (Spera, 2005). This reduction may be because parents understand that their child experiences an increased need to be autonomous (Ryan & Stiller, 1991; Steinberg, 1990). Very few studies have examined proactive parenting practices and how these influence child outcomes in adolescence (Padilla-Walker, Christensen, & Day, 2011). Barber, Maughan and Olsen (2005) argued that the parent-child relationship varies in line with parental behavioural practices or styles during adolescence. Moreover these authors stated that although parents' behaviours are indicative of the overall quality of parent-adolescent relationships, they are not completely equivalent.

Parents who spend a considerable amount of time with their child tend to engage in parental behaviours reflecting positive parenting (Wall, 2010) with a

positive effect on child development (Monna & Gauthier, 2008). Time investment in children can often involve communication, play, meeting the child's physical needs and supervision (Craig, Powell, & Smyth, 2014). Furthermore leisure with children is now considered to be an essential aspect of parenting (Milkie et al., 2004) and it is anticipated that shared leisure can promote family bonding (Craig, Powell, & Smyth, 2014), and joint family time can build healthy family relationships (Craig & Mullan, 2012).

There is now increasing evidence that parenting practices can influence adolescent developmental outcomes (Sheldon, 2015). Natarajan (2013) found that positive parenting practices in the form of bonding and parental involvement can act as protective factors against internalizing and externalizing problems among adolescents. Flouri and Buchanan (2003a) established a positive association between parental involvement and happiness as well as higher life satisfaction among British adolescents. Overall, there is support for a positive association between perceived parental involvement and adolescents' self-perception of their psychological well-being, with a focus on self-esteem and self-evaluation (e.g. Flouri & Buchanan, 2003a; Amato, 1994; Gibson & Jefferson, 2006; Roberts & Bengtson, 1993).

Parenting practices include behaviours that attempt to control the child (Pettit et al., 2001). In order to have a conceptual understanding of parental behavioural control, it is essential to acknowledge its multi-dimensional nature (Smetana & Daddis, 2002). Parental behavioural control generally refers to "parents' regulation of what children do" with a specific emphasis on parental guidance; monitoring - involving supervision and tracking; rule setting (Pomerantz & Wang, 2009, p. 285), parental knowledge - awareness of the child's situation; and parental discipline - use of reward and punishment for the child to meet parental expectations (Shek, 2006). In addition, parental behavioural control cannot be studied in isolation from the parent-child relationship given that it is the quality of this relationship (characterised by mutual trust, parent-child communication and child satisfaction of parental control) that determines the type of behavioural control parents choose (Crouter & Head, 2002).

As adolescents get older parents need to take a step back and balance the amount of behavioural control and regulation to allow them more autonomy, especially when it comes to personal issues (Smetana, 2000; Smetana & Asquith, 1994). Failure to do so often results in parent-adolescent conflict (Fuligni, 1998; Smetana & Asquith, 1994) since parental monitoring of adolescents' personal issues may be viewed as an invasion of privacy, hence controlling (Pettit & Laird, 2002). Nonetheless it remains essential to ensure that adolescents, in particular early adolescents, are monitored (Dishion & McMahon, 1998). Inadequate parental supervision has been linked with smoking amongst early adolescents (Radziszewska, Richardson, Dent, & Flay, 1996) whilst parental monitoring is associated with less delinquency amongst young adolescents (Pettit et al., 2001).

In contrast to psychological control which often underlies intrusiveness, pressure and overbearing attitudes, behavioural control entails a positive rather than negative impact on children's and adolescents' psychological development (Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009; Bean et al., 2003; Barber, Olsen, & Shagle, 1994) with more behavioural control being associated with improved adolescent functioning (Bean, Barber, & Crane, 2006). Similarly, a lack of behavioural control has been associated with externalising behaviours such as drug reliance, antisocial behaviour, delinquency and sexual precocity in adolescents (Barber, Olsen, & Shagle, 1994; Galambos, Barker, & Almeida, 2003; Pettit et al., 2001). The positive effect of parental behavioural control on adolescent achievement has also been reported. For instance, parental monitoring of homework is strongly associated with adolescent positive school outcomes (Clark, 1993) and parents' knowledge of their teenager's circle of friends is linked with the teenager's achievement scores (Muller, 1993). Other studies also found that higher parental behavioural control promotes better academic performance (Bean et al., 2003; Gray & Steinberg, 1999).

2.1.3 Overprotective parenting

As single-child families' parenting revolves around the only child, one particular dimension of parenting worth probing into is overprotection. The term 'overprotection' in parenting has received considerable public attention and growing media coverage in recent years (Brussoni & Olsen, 2013). Ungar (2009)

stated that overprotective parenting has intensified over time. Its prevalence is perhaps a result of parental perception of endless dangers that affect our current society (Valentine, 2004). Parents often tend to limit outdoor play because of their concerns for their child's safety (Clements, 2004), which also reflect parental fear. Popular media is inclined to associate overprotective parenting mainly with middle and upper class families (Patton, 2012) with existing empirical evidence supporting this assumption (Valentine, 2004). Several labels such as 'helicopter parenting', 'bulldozer parenting' and more recently, 'chauffeur parenting' are used interchangeably to refer to this type of parenting (Hancock, Lawrence, & Zubrick, 2014, p. 1). 'Helicopter' parents are often viewed as 'hovering' parents as they can be over-involved (one of the dimensions of overprotective parenting considered in the current study) in the life of their child (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012, p.1177). Likewise the terms 'bulldozer' and 'chauffeur' are used to refer to over-involved and sometimes overly pushy parents (Ganaprakasam, Davaidass, & Muniandy, 2018) who act as chauffeurs by closely monitoring the safety of their child (McLaren & Parusel, 2015).

From a theoretical perspective, Maccoby and Martin's (1983) dimension of demandingness/control at its extreme end has also been operationalised as overprotection (Lim & Lim, 2003). Overprotection is often associated with excessive intrusion and meddling in the child's activities and relationships (Shucksmith, Hendry, & Glendinning, 1995; McFarlane, Bellissimo, & Norman, 1995). Soenens and Vansteenkiste (2010) conceptualised overprotection as a form of psychological control whereby the child experiences a lot of internal pressure on an emotional level. This type of parenting can send the wrong message to a child that they cannot be safe and competent without parental assistance, which can create feelings of anxiety (Laurin, Joussemet, Tremblay, & Boivin, 2015). Other signs of overprotection from parents include high supervision, separation anxiety (Thomasgard & Metz, 1997), overindulgence, over-attentiveness, overanxious parenting behaviors (Parker, 1983) as well as premature problem-solving, babying and parental emotional oversensitivity to child's issues (Kins & Soenens, 2013). Wuyts et al. (2017) reported an inverse relationship between maternal separation anxiety and autonomy-supportive parental behaviours in families with a 14 year old adolescent (Larson et al., 1996)

although the underlying factors promoting overprotective parenting are not yet widely understood (Katrijn, Soenens, Petegem, & Kins, 2017). Nevertheless the main objective of overprotective parents remains to keep their child as safe and secure as possible (Hullmann et al., 2010; Brussoni & Olsen, 2013; Pimentel, 2012). Interestingly, according to McShane and Hastings (2009) overprotection also reflects a very close parent–child bond.

Although there have been many media stories highlighting the detrimental effect of overprotection on child development, empirical research on the developmental outcomes is very limited (Brussoni & Olsen, 2013). Some research found that overprotective parenting can lead to child internalizing issues (Rubin, Burgess, & Hastings, 2002; Hastings et al., 2008) and temperamental inhibition (Hastings et al., 2008); peer victimisation (Perren & Hornung, 2005) and bullying behaviour (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003b) as well as increased psychological problems and a decline in self-confidence (Holmbeck et al., 2002). College students with overprotective parents were shown to be more depressed with lower ratings on life satisfaction (Schiffrin et al., 2013), including reduced self-efficacy (Givertz & Segrin, 2012). Early adolescents whose parents were overprotective were also reported to be at high risk of developing functional somatic symptoms (Janssens, Oldehinkel, & Rosmalen, 2009). Based on a more recent study by Laurin, Joussemet, Tremblay and Boivin (2015), maternal overprotection was a predictor of child's anxiety from teachers' perspectives. Moreover Gere, Villaboa, Torgersen and Kendall (2012) reported a significant relationship between overprotective parenting and child behaviour problems. Parenting behaviours reflecting overprotection may vary in line with the developmental stage of children; hence the implications of overprotectiveness may vary according to the age of the child (Hancock, Lawrence, & Zubrick, 2014). Parental overprotection directed towards growing children, especially adolescents, may be more problematic than with younger children. Overprotective parenting that fails to respect the actual needs of teenagers (Segrin et al., 2015) limits opportunities for them to strive for independence (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012).

However, it is important to make a distinction between overprotection and merely being *very protective* parents. Parental protectiveness does not necessarily equate to overprotection bearing in mind that the appropriateness of parenting behaviours depends on keeping the child safe from any perceived risks (Ungar, 2009). This is especially relevant in the context of young adolescents. It is argued that some degree of overprotection is representative of normative parenting behaviour considering the perceived dangers that children are often exposed to nowadays. As a result, some parents can be perceived as being very protective without necessarily engaging in overprotection since they are still expected to display high vigilance as a normal parenting behaviour. In fact, failure to do so may label them as ‘bad parents’ (Valentine, 2004). Being overly concerned about the child in the form of parental fear as well as associated consequences of this parenting style are becoming increasingly normalised and hence not necessarily detrimental to child well-being. For example, there is some evidence suggesting that over the last few decades the levels of outdoor play for children are declining (Gray, 2001). As such, it is essential to draw attention to parents becoming more protective in response to the changing nature of today’s society without necessarily labelling them as overprotective parents.

It has been speculated in the past that there may be a relationship between birth order and overprotective parenting with first-borns being more likely to be protected than later-born siblings (Hudson & Rapee, 2005). The question is whether parents of an only child are more prone to engage in this type of parenting than parents with more than one child? The current study will therefore examine reported overprotective parenting behaviours, and any links with the well-being of adolescent only children.

2.1.4 Child-centred parenting

Child-centredness is another dimension of parenting that may be relevant when the singleton is the centre of parental attention. Regardless of the number of children in a family, for the last 50 years or so, popular media as well as parenting experts came to a consensus that child-centred parenting is effectively desirable. Parents who adopt a child-centred approach tend to be very sensitive to the developmental needs of their child, show respect towards their child, and treat

them as individuals in their own right as well as give them plenty of opportunities to exercise a freedom of choice that promotes autonomy (Cannella, 1997; Cannella & Viruru, 2004). Furthermore child-centred parenting reflects high investment in children including spending time with children as well as maintaining strong parent-child bonds (Ivan, Da Roit, & Knijn, 2015). In doing so, parents move away from a parent-centred approach whereby they are better equipped to cope with the different tasks and challenges of parenting while simultaneously displaying patience in mutual exchanges with their children (Sameroff & Feil, 1985). Putting children's interests first is an approach guided by the need to respect children's rights (Eurochild, 2010) in line with western parenting ideals. Along with other European countries such as France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, a recent study by Ivan, Da Roit and Knijn (2015) confirmed that in the UK, there has been a shift from traditional parenting values to the inclusion of child-centredness.

“Parenting programmes are far from new but in the last decade, parenting programmes have been designed to encourage the kind of behaviour on the part of the parent that will both promote and reinforce good behaviour in the child” (Lewis, 2011, p. 107).

Of the very few studies available on child-centred parenting, Landry, Garner, Swank, and Baldwin (1996) found that mothers who adopted a more child-centred perspective scored higher on responsiveness and attention-directing behaviours revolving around their child's interests than mothers who mostly used a parent-centred perspective. The benefits of child-centred parenting have also been reported by Saldinger, Porterfield and Cain (2004) with children suffering from less behavioural issues and depression in the context of bereavement. Another study by Johnstone and Gibbs (2010) identified child-centredness amongst adoptive parents in New Zealand with a strong commitment to the child's well-being. Importantly, child-centred parenting in families with adolescents seem to be, so far, widely under-researched.

Child-centred parenting is yet to be recognised as a specific type of parenting with operationalised attributes (Hoffman, 2013) and there is no currently validated assessment. Past research has referred to the child-centred

approach in different ways. For example, democratic parenting theories advocate for power sharing with children including welcoming their input in family decision-making (Oryan & Gastil, 2013). This reflects child-centredness as it is strongly founded in moral ideals such as freedom and equal rights (Appadurai, 1990). Kusserow (2004) and Lareau (2003) established that child-centred parenting is a parenting approach largely influenced by social-class differences suggesting that the ways in which parents talk to their child and their expectations with regards to the child's behaviour are strongly embedded in individualism, cultural capital and social stratification.

However, there has been criticism levelled against this emerging parenting approach. The extent to which "parents should do what is in the *best* interests of their child" is debatable and significantly influences the nature of demands placed on parents, which is not always necessarily positive and desirable (Blustein, 2012, p. 199). Child-centred parenting will be explored in the qualitative section of this research to examine its meaning and how it is experienced in single-child and multiple-children families.

2.2 Factors influencing parenting

In accordance with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1977), families do not exist in isolation. As an important component of the society amongst all other social institutions, and also from a structural perspective, there are various factors (at the micro and macro levels) that can influence parenting. Here the specific factors of family structure, and of parent and child gender will be considered.

2.2.1 Family structure

In light of changes in family structures in western countries including the changing roles of fathers, the relationship between dual parenting and children's development is becoming significantly more complex (Winsler, Madigan, & Aquilino, 2005). Remarkable changes in household structures have been witnessed in Europe since the early 2000s (Euromonitor International, 2014). In the UK, out of all the families with dependent children, there are 4.7 million families who are married or in civil partnership, 1.2 million cohabiting families

and 1.9 million single-parent families (ONS, 2013). In line with US findings from Kreider and Ellis (2011), these statistics suggest that this new trend in family structure is characteristic of western societies.

Early studies on the dynamics of single-child families reported that the single parent views the only child as a 'substitute mate' (Hawke & Knox, 1977). Furthermore single-parent only child families have been described as 'less hierarchical' although some concerns have been raised with regards to a lack of mutual support, closeness and that mother-son relations are characterised by tension in single-child families with a single parent (Weiss, 1979). Single-parent families are often at risk of experiencing financial difficulties (Amato, 1999; McLanahan, 1983), which could lead to parenting instability including harsh parenting (McLoyd, 1990). Regarding parenting practices, lone parent families engage in less monitoring and supervision of their child's activities while also having fewer expectations from their child (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Ram & Hou, 2003). Using a sample of adolescents aged 12 to 18, Demo and Acock (1996) reported less parental supervision, more adolescent-mother conflict and less mother-adolescent interaction in both single-parent and step families than in intact families. Furthermore Ledoux, Miller, Choquet and Plant (2002) postulated that single-parent families are likely to display less parental support than two-parent families.

Tinson, Nancarrow and Brace (2008) highlighted the need to distinguish between intact and blended families, which has implications for parenting as well as the parent-child relationship. For example, some studies report that parental investment is lower for stepchildren than biological children (Hofferth & Anderson, 2003; Case, Lin, & McLanahan, 2000). Heightened parent-child conflict has also been observed between children and stepparents (Fine & Schwebel, 1992) as well as between children and biological mothers with a stepfather in the family (Dunn, Davies, O'Connor, & Sturgess, 2000). As such, within the category of intact families, the current study will distinguish between two-parent families involving biologically and non-biologically related members.

With all the above in mind, the current study will investigate whether parenting in intact families is similar or different to that in non-intact families and

how this impacts the well-being of adolescents, for both single and multiple child structures.

2.2.2 Parent and child gender

Day and Padilla-Walker (2009) explained that mothers and fathers can take on different or combined roles when it comes to parenting adolescents and the nature of their roles is also influenced by the gender of the child. For instance, fathers tend to spend more time with their sons than their daughters (Yeung et al., 1999). Moreover fathers of sons are more involved and tend to be stricter with their sons with regards to discipline, school matters and other activities than fathers of daughters (Lamb et al., 1987). Differences by parental gender are commonly reflected in mothers' adoption of an authoritative parenting style while fathers mostly tend to engage in parenting practices influenced by an authoritarian parenting style, especially in relation to disciplinary strategies (Russell, Hart, Robinson, & Olsen, 2003). Child-centred parenting has also been associated with mothers more than fathers (Saldinger, Porterfield, & Cain, 2004).

With regards to parental monitoring, there is some evidence that girls are more closely supervised and have less access to autonomy opportunities than boys (Dishion & McMahon, 1998; Bumpus, Crouter, & McHale, 2001). Parental knowledge of the child's activities and experiences is higher for parents of same-sex children than parents of opposite-sex children (Crouter et al., 1999). From a child-centred point of view, girls are seen as having more say than boys in family decision-making (Brown & Mann, 1990; Fuligni & Eccles, 1993; Jacobs, Bennett, & Flanagan, 1993). Shek (1998) reported the influence of parent gender on Chinese adolescents' experience of being parented. Fathers were viewed as less responsive, less demanding, less worried and stricter than mothers. Furthermore girls and not boys perceived their mothers to be more demanding, although less strict, than their fathers. Using a sample of Latino mothers in focus groups, Guilamo-Ramos et al. (2007) found that parenting practices varied in line with adolescents' gender, where influenced by the Latino culture, boys enjoyed more freedom than girls.

So far, there is still a dearth of research involving fathers' report of their parenting (Pedro et al., 2012; Symeou & Georgiou, 2017). Results from a meta-

analysis by Hoeve et al. (2009) showed that barely 20% of the studies were sensitive to the roles played by the father figure despite that in comparison to maternal parenting behaviours, the effect of specific paternal parenting behaviours was greater. Therefore, there is a call for research to focus on the independent assessment of fathers' as well as mothers' parenting styles (Winsler, Madigan, & Aquilino, 2005; Berkien, Louwerse, Verhulst, & Ende, 2012; Symeou & Georgiou, 2017). Some evidence suggests that mothers' and fathers' parenting styles are similar (e.g.s. Baumrind, 1991; Paulson, 1994) including with adolescents (Stice & Barrera, 1995), whereas other studies showed that mothering and fathering do not always correlate (e.g.s. Baumrind, 1991; Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009). Fathers influence the well-being of their child (independently) as much as mothers regardless of whether their parenting is found to be similar (Steinberg & Silk, 2002; Stolz, Barber, & Olsen, 2005) or different (Stolz, Barber, & Olsen, 2005). Berkien, Louwerse, Verhulst and Ende (2012) noted that children exhibit more internalising and externalising problems when they perceive different parenting styles from each of their parents. Conversely, when children perceive their parents to be similar in parenting style they benefit mostly positively (Lindsey & Caldera, 2005). However, Thakar (2008) did not report any significant associations between incongruities in parenting style within a family and child behaviour.

Steinberg and Silk (2002) stated that in relation to adolescents, mothers and fathers may adopt different parenting approaches. Some findings show mothers as more involved and connected with their adolescent child than fathers (Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001; Padilla-Walker, Hardy, & Christensen, 2011). Moreover mothers are seen to be more engaged in socialization activities than fathers who are much more actively involved in play (Schoppe-Sullivan, Schermerhorn, & Cummings, 2007; Bretherton, 2010), communication and also, educational, supervisory and leisure related tasks (Hook & Wolfe, 2012) than mothers. In contrast to fathers, mothers are consistently reported spending more time with their children (Nomaguchi, Milkie, & Bianchi, 2005; Mannino & Deutsch, 2007). However, findings from the study of Brussoni and Olsen (2013) did not support the influence of parent and child gender on fathers' parenting behaviours.

Chang, Schwartz, Dodge and McBride-Chang (2003) found an association between fathers' harsh parenting (but not mothers') and child gender whereby sons were more affected than daughters. Past research also found the effect of father rather than mother involvement on adolescent happiness to be stronger (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003a). Similarly, according to Gere, Villaboa, Torgersen and Kendall (2012), research on overprotective parenting should be more sensitive to the influence of both parent and child gender. Previous studies found that overprotection was more strongly associated with child anxiety for girls than boys (Reitman & Asseff, 2010; Nishikawa, Sundbom, & Hagglof, 2010; van der Bruggen, Stams, & Bögels, 2008). The impact of fathers' overprotective parenting has been found to be stronger during adolescence (Verhoeven et al., 2012) although it has also been found that fathers are less overprotective than mothers (Holmbeck et al., 2002). Furthermore parents are more concerned about being overprotective towards girls than boys (Warr & Ellison, 2000; Carver, Timperio, Hesketh, & Crawford, 2010). Hence the current study takes into account both parent and child gender.

This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of existing parenting research and dimensions from a developmental perspective and with a focus on adolescence. Parenting can take different *styles* with the optimal parenting style in a developing society as being authoritative parenting. Parenting also relates to *practices* such as parental involvement and parental behavioural control. The literature also draws considerable attention to other specific parenting dimensions such as overprotection and child-centredness. There are some key factors influencing parenting such as family structure, parent and child gender. The next chapter will consider in depth the well-being of adolescents and how this might be affected by different aspects of parenting.

CHAPTER III: PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS AND THE WELL-BEING OF ADOLESCENTS

Cripps and Zyromski (2009; p. 1) put forward that there is a need for further exploration of the relationship between adolescents' well-being in particular, and parenting styles bearing in mind that 'adolescence is a critical period of development'. This chapter focuses specifically on early adolescence. Although it has long been established that parenting style modifies adolescent behaviour, it is important to acknowledge that the latter can also shape the former, indicating a bidirectional relationship (Kerr, Stattin, & Özdemir, 2012). It is also worth noting at this stage that Pollard and Lee (2003) noted an inconsistent if not diverging definition of the general term *wellbeing* in child development despite it remaining a widely used construct. For clarity, the present study focuses on the measurement of the psychological, emotional, social and behavioural dimensions of youth wellbeing; specifically first, subjective well-being, second, self-compassion, and third, peer relationships. This chapter also outlines the few existing studies on the association between parent-child relationships and the well-being of adolescent onlies in the domains of subjective wellbeing and peer relationships.

3.1 Early adolescence

According to Noller and Callan (1990), adolescents are often considered the best informants regarding research on family climate and parenting practices. Rossi (1980) stated that when children move to adolescence parents start to feel mostly concerned about their child's safety, security and comfort. Thus, during the phase of adolescence harmony is achieved in the family unit if it is able to preserve a strong sense of cohesion while also allowing the adolescent to develop a sense of individuation to become socially competent (Newman, 1989).

The current study specifically explores early adolescence, defined as ranging between 10 to 15 years (Allison, 2000; Goossens, 2006). Early adolescence brings about fundamental changes in the growing child in several domains: physical, social, emotional and cognitive. Furthermore, the parent-child relationship also starts to undergo significant changes with a less hierarchical nature and a more friendly rapport between parents and their young adolescent.

According to individuation theory, adolescents feel the need to maintain a close and caring relationship with their caregivers (Collins & Steinberg, 2006), whilst at the same stage adolescents start to spend a lot more time with friends giving a lot of importance to peer acceptance and relying considerably more on peers for advice and comfort (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). As a result, early adolescents often end up distancing themselves from their parents (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986). There is some evidence suggesting that early adolescence is a phase where closeness between parents and children declines, but this is only a temporary change (e.g.s. Steinberg, 1990; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991). In terms of how parents treat their young adolescents, Bumpus, Crouter and McHale (2001) drew attention to the influence of sex typing whereby parents tend to treat their young adolescent boys and girls along the lines of traditional notions of masculinity and femininity respectively. Gender differences in developmental outcomes in relation to adolescent mental health and self-esteem also start to emerge from early adolescence. For example, following puberty females suffer from depression, negative body image and externalising problems more than males (Benjet & Hernandez-Guzman, 2001).

Parenting during early adolescence undergoes various challenges such as increased parenting demands, a rise in both the frequency and intensity of parent-child conflict as well as an increased drive on behalf of the adolescent to become autonomous (Putnick et al., 2010). These challenges are often triggered by the young adolescent's strive for autonomy while simultaneously being still in need for guidance from parents. It is the fine balance between the aforementioned two developmental needs that early adolescents have to be able to achieve and often parents of young adolescents feel at a loss when it comes to parenting, which also includes dealing with the child's moody attitudes (Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2007). Parents have to alter their parenting behaviours such that they can respond optimally to these developmental changes (Rueth, Otterpohl, & Wild, 2016). Authoritarian parenting in early adolescence has detrimental effects for adolescents as it potentially limits their development of self-regulating behaviours (Moilanen, Rasmussen, & Padilla-Walker, 2014). During early adolescence parents still have considerable influence on their child (Grusec, 2011) since the latter trust them to be an important source of information (Bar-Tal et al., 1991).

However, this influence is likely to decline as the child moves to the later stages of adolescence and early adulthood (Sameroff, 2010). It is of no doubt that early adolescence impacts the family as a whole including parenting (Sheldon, 2015). In general, most families successfully cope with this transitional period (Beveridge & Berg, 2007) including parent-adolescent conflict which is usually infrequent and short-lived, mainly about trivial daily issues and entails minimum adverse impact on family dynamics (Montemayor, 1983; 1986). Therefore, it would be interesting to explore the links between parent-child relationships and adolescent well-being during the transitional phase of late childhood to adolescence.

3.2 Subjective well-being

Empirical interest in adolescent well-being in western societies has grown from 2000 onwards (Heaven, 2001). However, there is still a call for more research and the use of wide-ranging data collection methods for a more thorough understanding of adolescent well-being (Reavley & Sawyer, 2017). Subjective well-being is a psychological concept that is highly valued by most people (Diener, 1998). Existing literature on subjective wellbeing points to a number of conceptualisations of this term related to, for instance, psychological wellbeing (Ryff, 1995), happiness (Veenhoven, 1991), life satisfaction (Grob, 1991), and a juste milieu between positive and negative affect (Bradburn, 1969). All these aspects of subjective well-being are considered in the current study.

It has been previously documented that positive parent-child relationships positively influence adolescent well-being (Ryan, Stiller, & Lynch, 1994; van Wel, ter Bogt, & Raaijmakers, 2002). Other studies emphasise the importance of close parent-child relationships together with peer relationships to promote the wellbeing of adolescents (e.g. Field, Miguel, & Sanders, 2002; Rodgers & Rose; 2002; Paavonen, 2004). Using a sample of 14 to 18 year olds, Kocayoruk (2012) found that autonomy supportive relationships with parents enhanced the subjective well-being of adolescents. Along the same line, Ortman (1988) identified a positive relationship between feelings of social control, a sense of responsibility, and life satisfaction, amongst adolescents whose parents were supportive and with whom they shared a healthy relationship. Both maternal and

paternal bonds with the child affect the wellbeing and functioning of adolescents (Paterson, Field, & Pryor, 1994). Sheldon (2015) stipulated that regardless of different parenting approaches used by mothers and fathers, parent-child connectedness and parent involvement largely contribute towards adolescent wellbeing. Cripps and Zyromski (2009) confirmed that perceived parental involvement affects the psychological wellbeing of adolescents. There is some evidence suggesting that overprotective parenting is negatively linked with children's socio-emotional wellbeing. For instance, high maternal separation anxiety has been previously associated with overprotective parenting and poor socio-emotional wellbeing outcomes (Cooklin et al., 2013) although this evidence is restricted to very young children. Therefore, there is a gap in knowledge with reference to overprotective parenting and adolescent wellbeing. A meta-analysis of 1,015 studies by Pinquart (2017) showed a very strong relationship between parenting and internalising problems among children and adolescents. That is, strict control, psychological control, authoritarian and also some elements of neglectful parenting are positively correlated with internalising problems.

There are some studies which have examined the links between parent-child relationships and wellbeing in early adolescence specifically. Schwarz et al. (2012) reported that there is a positive association between parental admiration and early adolescents' life satisfaction. Whilst life satisfaction has been shown to be positively related to parental warmth during adolescence (Pinquart, Silbereisen, & Juang, 2004), parental support has also been positively associated with adolescent life satisfaction with a stronger effect in early than middle and late adolescence (Suldo & Huebner, 2004). Milevsky, Schlechter, Klem and Kehl (2008) found that authoritative parenting is associated with higher life satisfaction than authoritarian and neglectful parenting amongst early as well as older adolescents. The perceptions of permissive and authoritarian parenting styles amongst teenagers are associated with lower psychological/subjective wellbeing (Lavasani, Borhanzadeh, Afzali, & Hejazi, 2011) with permissive parenting also related to poor behavioural and psychological outcomes (Driscoll, Russell, & Crockett, 2008). Further research showed that parental autonomy support is important for the psychosocial adjustment of adolescents (Rueth, Otterpohl, & Wild, 2016). Using a longitudinal design, Putnick et al. (2008) examined 10 year

olds' perceptions of parenting and later measured their self-concept at the age of 14. They found an association between both perceived maternal and paternal acceptance and adolescent social acceptance; emphasising a strong link between healthy parent-child relationships and positive self-concept in early adolescence.

Few studies have assessed the relationship between parenting and adolescent wellbeing in UK. The first study by Maynard and Harding (2010), using Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire with British adolescents aged 11-13 years, reported lower levels of psychological difficulties amongst adolescents receiving higher parental care whilst higher levels of psychological difficulties were experienced by those adolescents exposed to high parental control. The second study by Chan and Koo (2011) used a sample of British adolescents aged 15 years old and provides further support for the strong association between parenting style and youth outcomes in the domains of subjective wellbeing, self-esteem, health and risky behaviour, and academic outcomes. Youth of authoritarian and permissive parents scored lower on wellbeing than their peers with authoritative parents. Girls had lower adolescent subjective wellbeing than boys but family structure and social class were not found to have any significant effect. Thus in the context of UK, adolescent wellbeing seems to be more influenced by parenting than family structure and/or social class. However, the authors reported that family structure and not social class strongly shapes parenting style in British families, i.e. authoritative parenting style was more prevalent in two-parent families than in both lone-parent and step-families. Therefore it is also important to acknowledge the influence of mediating factors such as family structure on adolescent well-being.

Cecen-Erogul and Dingiltepe (2012) noted lower levels of life satisfaction and psychological health among adolescents with a mean age of 16 years living in lone-parent families than their counterparts from intact families. A US study by Krueger et al. (2015) also reported poorer outcomes on wellbeing dimensions amongst children and adolescents from single-parent and cohabiting families than those living with married couples. Likewise, Demo and Acock (1996) reported higher scores on wellbeing measures in intact American families than in single-parent families and step-families, with mother-adolescent disagreement as the

strongest predictor of adolescent wellbeing. Further support stems from Bergström et al. (2013) where young Swedish adolescents from nuclear families as well as their counterparts living in joint physical custody scored higher on subjective wellbeing than those from lone-parent households. However, it is not always the case that children living in diverse non-traditional family structures fare less well (McAdoo, 1995). According to McFarlane et al. (1995), parenting style is a much stronger determinant of adolescent wellbeing than family structure. In line with this, Grossman and Rowat (1995) reported that perceived poor parental relationship rather than family status was linked to a decline in life satisfaction in a sample of Canadian adolescents. In addition, Amato and Fowler (2002) did not identify any effect of parents' race, ethnicity, gender, family structure, education or income level in predicting child wellbeing. However, Shek (1998) reported lower psychological well-being (measured in terms of hopelessness, mastery, life satisfaction, self-esteem) amongst Chinese adolescents from a less favourable socio-economic background than those without an economic disadvantage. These mixed findings suggest that factors such as family structure and socio-economic status are important variables to consider.

Taking into account that on a global level family size is shrinking considerably, this new family trend is paving the way for a more child-centred approach (Larson et al., 2002), which is presumed to mostly have a positive effect on child wellbeing including mental health (Call et al., 2002). Only one study (from the Netherlands) has been identified as focusing specifically on the wellbeing of adolescent only children. Veenhoven and Verkuyten (1989) found that in comparison to their counterparts with siblings, adolescent only children were not shown to be any less joyful, less satisfied with life, less popular, or have less self-esteem. They also did not view themselves to be better at school. A significant difference was noted for adolescent only girls with unemployed fathers who reported less life satisfaction and scored higher on depression. The authors argued that when parents were unemployed the only children were more affected by their parents' situation than the non-only children since they felt more dependent on their parents in the absence of sibling support. Another interesting finding was that the only children engaged in less participation in sports and were even less adept at sports than the non-only children. Therefore, the current study

also aimed to look into the association between parenting and the subjective well-being of the adolescents while assessing the links to demographic characteristics.

3.3 Self-compassion

Self-compassion is a construct of wellbeing that is relatively new and under-researched (although receiving increasing empirical interest), and is often chosen now over the more widely researched concept of self-esteem. Self-compassion is conceptualised as ‘being open to and moved by one’s own suffering, experiencing feelings of caring and kindness toward oneself, taking an understanding, non-judgmental attitude toward one’s inadequacies and failures, and recognizing that one’s own experience is part of the common human experience’ (Neff, 2003, p. 224). Although there exists a moderate correlation between self-esteem and self-compassion, the latter has been shown to be a stronger negative predictor of public self-consciousness, antagonism, need for closure, self-rumination and social comparison (Neff, 2005; Neff & Vonk, 2009). Self-compassion is also a predictor of more unwavering feelings of self-worth than self-esteem and is less influenced by specific outcome variables. On an emotional level, self-compassion has been related to better emotional balance than self-esteem (Leary, Tate, Adams, & Allen, 2006). Therefore Neff and Vonk (2009, p. 23) concluded that self-compassion is a better alternate to global self-esteem in terms of the measurement of a “healthy self-stance”. Furthermore past research identified a significant relationship between self-centredness and high self-esteem (Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell, 2000 as cited in Neff, 2003). However, Neff (2003) postulated that given that self-compassion is not measured in terms of performance evaluations of the self or even others with an inclination to also *like* oneself (high self-esteem), self-centredness should not be related to self-compassion. Therefore, in the context of only-children who are often negatively stereotyped as being self-centred individuals, they might be expected to rate lower on self-compassion than non-only children.

The mental health benefits of self-compassion have received a lot of attention (Neff, 2011) with existing evidence suggesting that there is an inverse relationship between self-compassion and psychopathology (Barnard & Curry, 2011) namely depression, anxiety and stress (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012). In

particular, there is a strong relationship between self-compassion and psychological wellbeing with specific reference to a boost in happiness, optimism, personal initiative, and connectedness, with reduced anxiety, depression, neurotic perfectionism, and rumination (Neff, 2009; Heffernan, Griffin, McNulty, & Fitzpatrick, 2010; Hollis-Walker & Colosimo, 2011) and also, higher life satisfaction (Neff, 2003). Adolescence is a developmental period characterised by intense feelings of self-judgments and self-worth evaluation (Jacobs et al., 2002), which justifies the need for more empirical attention in this specific area. According to Collins (1997), the adolescent experience encompasses self-compassion in the sense that feelings of self-acceptance and self-kindness embedded in the overall attribute of self-compassion help adolescents to engage in fewer negative self-evaluations in situations where they are faced with disliked aspects of themselves.

Two studies have specifically focused on self-compassion in adolescence. The first was by Neff and McGehee (2010) who used a sample of American adolescents with mean age 15.2 years. Their findings supported a strong association between self-compassion and wellbeing in adolescents. They argued that given the distinction between self-compassion and self-esteem, with the latter associated with problem behaviours such as bullying, delinquency, self-absorption and narcissism (Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell, 2000; Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996; Crocker & Park, 2004 as cited in Neff & McGehee, 2010), promoting high self-esteem in adolescents should be cautioned. Conversely, self-compassion can protect adolescents from being harsh towards themselves, which should reflect positively on their subjective wellbeing. The second study by Bluth and Blanton (2013), again in the US, identified self-compassion as a mediator in the pathway to adolescent emotional wellbeing. Hence, both studies highlight the relevance of self-compassion to the adolescent experience. However, research on self-compassion among British adolescents seems to be virtually non-existent.

Evidence suggests that maternal support, good family functioning and strong attachment are related to positive psychological health (e.g.s. Barber & Harmon, 2002; Cooper, Shaver, & Collins, 1998; Crittenden, Claussen, & Sugarman, 1994; Steinberg, 1990 as cited in Neff & McGehee, 2010). Therefore,

Neff and McGeehee (2010) probed into the roles played by the family in promoting self-compassion and revealed that a lack of self-compassion is linked to dysfunctional families and insecure parent-child attachment. An adolescent who is exposed to a positive family environment and experiences a secure attachment pattern with a supportive mother is anticipated to have higher self-compassion based on positive modelling of care and compassion. Dysfunctional family relationships in contrast are mostly characterised by self-criticism and limited self-compassion along with negative self-attitudes. Some preliminary findings from the work of Neff (2008) point towards a potential association between adolescent self-compassion and maternal criticism. However, no study has yet explored the association between parenting and self-compassion among adolescents including adolescent only-children.

Taking all the above into consideration, the current study was interested in adopting a positive psychological stand point to explore the positive aspects of the subjective wellbeing of adolescent only-children in the form of self-compassion. As stated by Seligman and Csikzentmihalyi (2000; as cited in Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007, p. 909), “it is necessary to consider well-being not only in terms of the absence of psychopathology, but also in terms of human strengths and potentials”. The current study specifically aimed to assess if parenting is associated with self-compassion and whether self-compassion acts as one of the routes through which family factors influence well-being. More generally it asks “how do only-children compare to non-only children on self-compassion?”

According to Dekovic and Meeus (1997), feelings of self-worth may smoothly pave the way to the development of satisfactory peer relationships and in particular it has been previously reported that adolescents with higher self-esteem are in a better position to be engaged in close relationships (Fullerton & Ursano, 1994). However, whether a similar positive correlation could be predicted between self-compassion and peer relationships seems yet to be examined. Therefore, the current study also intends to look into the association between parenting and the well-being of the adolescents in terms of their relationships with their peers, and assess the links to self-compassion.

3.4 Peer relationships

Parents of an only child need to take socialization seriously. Find a peer who is like your child in temperament. Then, woo her. Take them together to museums and playgrounds, for example, for regular play dates [...] It is critical for an only child to have a friend. Having one helps an only child make the transition to a group setting, such as school, and to be accepted by other children of her age (Brazelton & Sparrow, 2006, p. 1).

It is perhaps no surprise that it has long been speculated that when one thinks of an only-child, one also thinks of having no friends (Rivera & Carrasquillo, 1997). Having said that, Johnson (2014, p. 6), who wrote a paper on the life of an only-child inspired by his own experience, stated that having no siblings is not a handicap for singletons given that friends “play an equivalent role in our growth”. Johnson further added that being an only-child who spent considerable time on his own purposely encouraged him to forge and maintain close friendships. Nachman and Thompson (1998) explained that for only-children, close proximity with friends in the form of positive peer relations is essential for their socialisation and wellbeing.

Parenting can influence children’s peer relationships regardless of only-child status. For example, parenting rooted in psychological control and coercion has been found to be a predictor of aggressive behaviours towards peers among children in western (e.g.s. Nelson & Crick, 2002; Hart, Newell, & Olsen, 2003) and non-western societies (Nelson et al., 2006). Adolescence is a developmental phase when growing children start to spend more time with peers and seek peer advice. Friendship quality has high significance for growing children during adolescence (Veronneau & Vitaro, 2007). Family experiences prior to a child starting school play a key role in shaping their ability to adapt and cope in their new environment with a potential impact on their peer relationships (Ladd, 1992). In fact, affiliation with peers is rated higher amongst adolescents who perceive their parents to be very controlling (Fuligni & Eccles, 1993). Nonetheless Mounts (2002) drew attention to a lack of research focusing on the association between parenting practices and peer relations in adolescence.

Nickerson and Nagle (2004) reported negative associations between early adolescents' life satisfaction and perceived distancing from both parents and peers with another study confirming a stronger association between parent attachment and life satisfaction than between peer attachment and life satisfaction (Ma & Huebner, 2008). This suggests that parent-child relationships can have a bigger impact on adolescent wellbeing than peer relationships. Family structure has been shown to impact peer relationships. For example, Turner, Finkelhor and Ormrod (2007) reported higher peer victimisation amongst adolescents aged 10 to 17 from stepfamilies than those from intact or even single-parent families. Whilst past research examined the relationship between family structure and peer relations, the influence of family size (in terms of the number of children) on peer relations has received less empirical interest.

Regarding the influence of parenting on peer relations, a meta-analysis by Lereya, Samara and Wolke (2013) concluded that there is substantial evidence pointing towards the association of negative parenting in the form of abuse, neglect and dysfunctional parenting with bullying (bully/victims). Conversely, positive parenting in the form of good parent-child communication, parental warmth, parental monitoring, parental involvement and, parental support was a significant protective factor against peer victimisation. This association finds further support from Dekovic and Meeus (1997) who reported a positive relationship between warm supportive parenting from both mothers and fathers, and positive peer relationships among 12 to 18 year old adolescents, as did Engels, Dekovic and Meeus (2002) for the same age group.

Early research investigating the association between only children as well as non-only children and peer relationships posited that children with siblings tend to have a good relationship with others as they are not usually subjected to intensive parenting (Bossard & Boll, 1956). These researchers on the interpersonal skills of children from small family units explained that siblings relate well to each other as they learn to get along during their socialisation process in the home environment. Conversely, children from small families including only children, tend to work best on their own with not much social interaction as they have rather limited experience being around friends. Other

research by Sutton-Smith and Rosenberg (1970), Terhune (1974), and more recently, Kitzmann, Cohen and Lockwood (2002) as well as Yucel and Downey (2015) support the general argument that siblings are essential agents of socialisation in the home setting for the development of transferrable interpersonal behaviours and skills. Therefore people might still firmly believe that only children could be socially disadvantaged. Yucel and Downey (2015) strongly dispute this belief reporting that number of siblings was not linked to peer relationship quality among 10-15 year old British adolescents. However, the quality of sibling relationships was found to affect peer relationship quality. Bobbitt-Zeher and Downey (2013) also reported no difference in peer nominations of friendship for adolescent only and non-only children. However, findings from Kitzmann, Cohen and Lockwood (2002) indicated that although only children with a mean age of eight years did not differ from their counterparts in terms of the frequency of close friendships and friendship quality, they were still less liked by their peers and were reported to be more at risk both of being aggressive towards their peers and being victimised by them. Whether these differences in peer relations can be attributed to the different developmental stages of the only-children used in the above studies (adolescents in comparison to younger children) is still unknown.

In her comparative study on only children and non-only children, Johnson (1985) took a different stance. She explained that parental activity in relation to the child's exposure to social systems external to the family setting can promote the social development of a singleton regardless of the absence of siblings. In fact, she asserted that parental involvement in their child's interests/activities can equally have a positive effect on the sociability of an only-child. Along the same line, Meredith, Abbott and Ming (1992) further emphasised the minimal differentiation between onlies and children with siblings in relation to social skills. They found that Chinese only-children were as likely, if not perhaps even more likely than non-only children, to get on well with others including engaging in prosocial behaviours.

This chapter emphasises the importance of researching early adolescence as a unique developmental stage with links to parent-child relationships and

adolescent wellbeing. It also outlines existing research on subjective wellbeing, self-compassion and peer relationships amongst adolescents including the few available studies involving only-children. Positive parent-child relationships have a positive impact on adolescent subjective well-being. However, research in this area in UK is scant. Literature also shows that the association between parenting and adolescent subjective well-being can be mediated by other factors such as child gender and family structure. Moreover although there is some evidence pointing towards a positive relationship between healthy family dynamics and self-compassion, research involving adolescents is still very limited; even more so amongst British adolescents. Parenting has also been shown to influence peer relationships; an area which is, so far, widely under-researched in the context of singletons. The next chapter will provide a more in-depth overview of available research on only-children with a specific focus on parenting in this family type and the developmental outcomes of these children.

CHAPTER IV: ONLY CHILDREN

4.1 Single-child families

One-child households are a foreign concept to many, and break from widely held, age-old beliefs about parenting and raising children, both of which have helped give rise to rather partial views about this family structure and the offspring it yields (Johnson, 2014, p. 8).

To have or not to have just one child? One of the first studies focusing on single-child families looked into possible reasons for families not having more than one child (Ward, 1930). Six possible reasons emerged from the family information given: the mother's low physical health; mother's age; financial concerns; working mothers; both parents' own choice of not having another child; and also time factor. Physical health was highlighted as the principal cause. Throughout the majority of the 20th century very few American families opted for a single child (Blake, 1981). Falbo (1978) noted that those actively choosing a single-child family were viewed as rather deviant. Moreover, it was perceived that parents of an only-child showed less commitment to parenthood than other parents and were responsible for bringing up children who are less well-adjusted (Callan, 1986). Women choosing to have an only child in the 1970s were mostly found to be from non-traditional backgrounds, in non-traditional marriages and were more educated and independent than other women. Conversely, women who involuntarily had a single child were mostly similar to women with multiple children in terms of their background, although unhappy that they could not have more than one child (Lewis, 1972); this disappointment may have an impact on their parenting (Falbo, 1983). Research has also associated other factors with the number of children in a family: access to better contraceptives and healthcare treatments; more accepted abortion laws; rising living standards; changes in people's attitudes and behaviours (Joby, 1997); women bearing children at a later stage in life (Rosen, 2001); and more recently, the increasing cost of raising children (Johnson, 2014).

In comparison to other families, a single-child family is more often headed by a single parent (Blake, 1981); often the mother who is in full time employment

(Wilson & Knox, 1981), from an ethnic minority group, and/or going through divorce and financial difficulties (Ryan, 1997). Some concerns have been raised regarding the functioning of those one-child families with lone parent mothers (Weiss, 1979). Using clinical samples of single-child families with adolescent only children and a control group of only children from intact families or children in lone-parent families, Bayrakal and Kope (1990) confirmed that the single-parent/only-child families experienced more difficulties. However, Polit (1984) reported that single-parent families with an only child coped better after divorce and scored higher on psychosocial outcomes than families with multiple children. In one-child families with a single parent, the child is often treated as a substitute friend by the single-parent (Hawke & Knox, 1977). However, these families are also less hierarchical, less supportive with less parent-child closeness and often reflect stressful relationships between mothers and sons (Weiss, 1979). Nonetheless, only children with a single parent are also perceived to be autonomous (Polit, 1984).

Studies on single-child families in the US found that both the mother and father tend to be highly educated (Hawke & Knox, 1977) which was also the case for mothers of only children in Australia (Callan, 1985). In fact, Parr (2007) reported that there is accumulating evidence suggesting that highly educated women are more reticent about having a second child. US studies also found that parents of only children are generally from the professional and managerial classes (Wilson & Knox, 1981) and more recently, a similar trend was also revealed in India with a greater number of single-child families in urban regions and amongst well educated older mothers in professional jobs (Pradhan & Sekher, 2014).

A common perception previously was that one-child families engage in inadequate parenting (e.g. Blake, 1974; Thompson, 1974) although this assumption has been surprisingly untested. Viewing the one-child household as far from being the ideal family type is mostly a product of negative stereotyping in the absence of empirical evidence (Mancillas, 2006). In fact, many parents internalise the negative connotations attached to only children and feel pressured to have a second child (Falbo & Polit, 1986; Veenhoven & Verkuyten, 1989).

Chaudhari (2015) provided a more positive picture by arguing that although it remains a tough decision to decide whether or not to have an only child, this type of family often involves parents who are very relaxed. In addition, the singleton does not lack affection given that the parents have all the time, energy and resources to attend to their needs. As early as the 1970s, Allen (1975) noted that this family type can provide couples with the opportunity to become parents while simultaneously still being able to invest in their own personal growth and development. These parents experience less financial pressure, more freedom, no sibling rivalry and devote more time to their only-child. Blake (1989) similarly suggested that small family size has positive effects such as parents spend more time in children's educational and leisure activities and, according to Bianchi and Robinson (1997), children in smaller family units spend less time doing house chores. Hence this family type can actually be beneficial to the child as well as the parents. Further support comes from Johnson (2014) who argued that with the cost of raising children increasing day by day in our current society, one-child households are better equipped to survive this financial pressure.

Taking all the above into account, perhaps a more positive view of single-child families should become apparent. As nicely put by McKibben (1998, p. 643), "single-child families can work and singletons are no different from anyone else". Sorensen (2006) noted that in US one-child families are perceived mostly in a positive light. In Britain there is a lack of social approval for the single-child family and this often prevents families from stopping at one child. For example, in 1994, 75% of British respondents of the Social Attitudes Survey showed a preference for the two-child family as the ideal family type. Data from the General Household Survey (GHS) showed that childless British women think that having an only child is less accepted than childlessness. In fact, more British women end up with a singleton by accident rather than by choice (Jefferies, 2001). Qualitative findings go beyond quantitative survey results suggesting that some British women do actively choose to have an only-child (Laybourn, 1994 as cited in Jefferies, 2001). Therefore, a qualitative approach may be effective in providing a more in-depth insight into this topic.

4.1.1 Parenting in single-child families

If caregiving and care-receiving over the life span are essential to the optimal development of the mature personality, then those who have the resources to raise children should be encouraged to have two children, rather than having a single child or remaining childless (Cicirelli, 1989, p. 174).

As early as the 1880s, speculations about the parenting of only-children started to emerge. Bohannon (1898, p. 493) argued that an only-child is “never allowed to do anything”, “petted”, “spoiled”, “indulged”, “coddled” and he “had his own way in everything”. Likewise, Ward (1930) portrayed parents of only-children as care givers who give too much attention to the child, spoil the child, exhibit over solicitousness towards the child and interfere in the child’s life. It is crucial to reiterate that there is very little empirical evidence to support the above perceptions.

One study (perhaps the only one involving adolescent onlies) by Kloepper, Leonard and Huang (1981) investigated the degree to which only-children students compared to students from multiple-children families in relation to their perceptions of their parents’ control of their behaviours and activities as teenagers. Most teenagers, regardless of whether they were from single-child or multiple children families, benefited from a significant amount of freedom from their parents. Although weakly supported, some only-children were granted more autonomy and were less severely sanctioned than non-only children. However, the above study focused on the age group of 16-18 with no inclusion of early adolescents.

A survey carried out in 1977 in USA clearly showed that the general public (more than 60% of the respondents) believed that an only-child is overprotected (Blake, 1981). Is this a myth or reality? One of the few studies which looked at overprotective parenting in single-child families is that of Howe and Madgett (1975) who focused on a group of children aged 5-12 who were referred to a child psychiatric clinic. Parents of only children were reported as significantly more overprotective than parents of non-only children. The authors

argued that this can be understood as the parents' greater concern for their only child's emotional wellbeing given that in general only children often 'tend to turn out well and to be happy and satisfied with life' (Laybourn, 1994, p. 145). Using a sample of British only children aged less than five, Richards and Goodman (1996) reported similar results. Parents of very young only-children were rated as overprotective which was not the case for parents with a singleton older than five years. In the case of adolescents, Doh (1999) did not find any significant differences in attention-giving and overprotectiveness between mothers of young adolescent only-children and mothers with more than one child from a South Korean background. The reason/s for having an only-child could also have an effect on parenting; in particular, overprotectiveness. Those parents who wanted to have more than one child but were not successful may be more likely to overprotect and indulge their one and only child. By contrast, parents who explicitly chose not to have more than one child, would be more comfortable to support their child to develop autonomous behaviours and hence treat the child more evenly (Falbo, 1982). As such, overprotectiveness in single-child families with an early adolescent in the UK is an area which necessitates more empirical attention.

A very interesting but under-researched aspect of parenting in one-child families coined as *parental brokering* was put forward by Johnson (1985) suggesting that unlike parents of multiple children, parents with a singleton are expected to also play a mediating role between their child and the wider society. That is, they should act as facilitators in terms of introducing their child to different clubs, organisations, institutions including potential friends as well as encouraging them to socialise, which ultimately will help to counterbalance the negative impact of not having any sibling on their social skills. Likewise, the quality of parent-child communication in one-child families is also under-researched. Reagan (2008) examined the quality of parent-adolescent communication amongst only-children and children with siblings using the parent-adolescent communication scale – PACS (1998). No significant differences were shown between both groups suggesting that adolescent only-children do not differ much from non-only children in this regard.

Basket (1985) explored parental expectations or beliefs about a child solely in relation to their sibling status. This study showed that parents were more inclined to have higher expectations and positive views of oldest children than singletons and youngest children. Findings using a sample of American mothers challenged the stereotypical belief that parents of only-children hold higher expectations than parents with more than one child. There were no significant differences in parental expectations between mothers of one child, two children and multiple children (Bush-Glenn, 1990). Nonetheless, findings in this area are inconclusive. Sorensen (2006, p. 39) referred to 'parental enmeshment' in single-child families where "children experience themselves as an extension of a parent". That is, only-children can be burdened by having to live up to the expectations of their parents since their achievements symbolise parental achievement.

Due to the one-child policy in China, parenting research there has mostly revolved around single-child families. Although these findings cannot be easily generalised to British only children, they are informative in light of the lack of research on one-child families from other countries. Ngan-ling Chow and Zhao (1996) found that parents of young only-children scored higher on child-centredness (irrespective of child gender) than parents with multiple children. Mothers adopted a child-centred approach to parenting more than fathers did in single-child families. Furthermore group differences between the two groups extended to the amount of time parents spent with their child, with parents of an only child generally spending more time including leisure time with their child (together with more regular family outings). Moreover mothers, but not fathers, of an only-child had more expectations for their child than their counterparts in multiple-children families. Although parents in both groups had different types of concerns about their child, parents of an only-child were significantly more worried about child accidents and illness, and overall were more concerned than parents of multiple children. Single-child families were more attuned to improve their parenting skills than multiple-child families (Ngan-ling Chow & Zhao, 1996).

Drawing on other research on only-children, Liu (2006) reported qualitative differences based on child gender and less so in relation to social class;

with the only-child status having relatively minimum influence. This study suggests that traditional gender roles matter more to parents than the only-child status in collectivistic societies. Further support comes from Xie (1997), which also reported gender differences in the parenting of Chinese only-children, with parents of sons exhibiting more control than parents of daughters. However, no child gender differences were found in relation to parental encouragement for autonomous behaviours. Differential perceptions of parenting practices were found between parents and their children: mothers viewed themselves as more controlling and less consistent in their disciplinary approach than their children. Only-children perceived their fathers to be less controlling than their mothers. Another study by Xie and Hultgren (1994) found that Chinese parents with an only child aged 6-13 experienced the influence of parent and child gender on their childrearing practices. Mothers felt more successful than fathers in terms of parenting an only-child and parents of sons experienced more challenges and difficulties than parents of daughters. A common postulation regarding only-children and their influence on family decision-making relates to parents' acceptance of their child having quite a bit of say in family matters. The study of Flurry and Veeck (2009) challenges this assumption as Chinese only-children were not found to have as much of a dominant influence on family decision-making as expected.

Some studies on the effect of birth order on parenting can contribute towards a better understanding of parenting of only-children. Furman and Lanthier (2002) concluded that there are differences in parental treatment in relation to birth order whereby firstborns are likely to benefit from more sensitive and higher-quality care in comparison to later-borns. However, their sample was made up of young children. Similarly, Price (2006) found that first-borns are allowed more quality time on a daily basis with their parents than second-borns. One can wonder whether this would also hold true for adolescent only-children given that they are firstborns for life. A study was undertaken in Brazil by Freitas and Piccinini (2010) to capture any existing differences in parental child-rearing practices between only children and first-borns aged 4 to 7. First-borns were all from families with two children. Results revealed only marginally significant

differences in maternal and paternal child-rearing practices between the single-child and two-child families.

No study has yet identified one common parenting style used in single-child families. Liu (2010) speculated that the traditional culturally influenced authoritarian parenting style commonly associated with Chinese parents can gradually fade away giving place to permissive and authoritative parenting as a result of having only one child. Parents have more resources to invest on an only-child and can also provide more attention and be more tolerant with just one child. One study which did specifically investigate parenting style and parenting practices of one-child families is Lu and Chang (2013) in urban China with children aged 7.3 years on average. Findings revealed that parents of only-children adopted mostly an authoritative rather than authoritarian parenting style. Moreover their parenting practices were child-centred, egalitarian and characterised by parental warmth rather than parental control. These parents also promoted prosocial assertiveness and limited behavioural constraint. Contrary to expectations, child gender did not influence their parenting and socialisation of their only-child. Further support, again in a Chinese context, comes from the study of Way et al. (2013) which reported that mothers with adolescent only-children supported their adolescents in becoming self-sufficient and also provided them with considerable freedom of choice to make their own decisions. These parents reported being mostly concerned about the psychological well-being of their offspring in the changing context of the Chinese society, which perhaps also explains the shift from the traditional ‘tiger parenting’ ideologies to a more child-centred parenting approach. With all the above in mind, there is a need to examine the developmental outcomes of only-children especially in relation to parenting.

4.2 Only children and their developmental outcomes

“Being an only child is disease in itself” (Fenton, 1928 as cited in Campbell, 1934); a quote which clearly emphasises psychologists’ concern about children raised in the absence of siblings (Mottus, Indus, & Allik, 2008, p. 1047). Some research has investigated the public perceptions of only children themselves. Baskett (1985) asked 278 participants to complete three 50-item, 7-

point adjective checklists which required them “to describe what they would expect a child without brothers or sisters, a child who was the oldest in his or her family, and a child who was the youngest in his or her family to be like” (p. 442). Participants believed that only-children would be the most academically oriented, the most pampered, and the least likeable. Furthermore participants had a more positive view of firstborns than only-children. Replicating the above study using the same checklists, Musun-Miller (1993) reported identical findings. Similarly, Nyman (1995, p. 53) asked 139 participants to “list three words that described the characteristics of each birth position”. Participants displayed a more positive opinion on firstborns than only-children and described the latter as mostly independent, self-centred, selfish, and spoiled. More recently, Herrera, Zajonc, Wieczorkowska and Cichomski (2003) also reported that participants rated only children as the most disagreeable. Therefore, the general public perception is that only children are less desirable than non-only children supporting the existence of some strong societal negative beliefs about only children (Falbo, 1982). However, there is evidence for more positive developmental outcomes for only-children than children in large families (Mellor, 1990; Falbo & Polit, 1986).

4.2.1 Adult only-children

Some empirical attention has been given to adult only-children. Twigg and Roomaney (2014) studied interpersonal relationships of young adult only-children in South Africa based on the assumption that children without siblings might have more difficulties relating to others. They found that only-children enjoyed as positive a relationship with both their parents and peers as those with siblings. Glenn and Hoppe (1984) paid particular attention to the psychological well-being of adult only-children in US. They found that there was no statistically significant effect of having a sibling on wellbeing suggesting that the stereotypical belief that only-children are mostly unhappy and maladjusted is questionable. Roberts and Blanton (2001) interviewed adult only-children in US to probe into the experience of being an only-child in adulthood, and revealed both advantages and disadvantages. On a positive note these offspring did not experience sibling rivalry, enjoyed their alone time, appreciated being the centre of attention for their parents emotionally as well as financially and developed a very close relationship

with their parents. However, several challenges resulted from the only-child status: no sibling as support, pressure to excel, being attention-seekers, peer relationship difficulties and also, major concerns for later life especially in terms of shouldering the responsibility of ageing parents and loneliness following the death of their parents.

4.2.2 Only-children vs. non-only children: A comparative approach

One of the first comparative studies of only and non-only children was by Guildford and Worcester (1930). They found that adolescent only children were either similar or better than non-only adolescents on 14 out of 15 dimensions measured; IQ level, academic performance, father's occupational status, efficiency, courtesy, truthfulness, industry, initiation, self-control, cooperation, dependability, health attitudes and habits, personal orderliness and cleanliness, conformity to law and order, and fairness. A review of the literature on only-children revealed that since then there have been a number of studies which attempted to compare only-children to children with siblings in different countries and on different levels (see chapter 3) including behavioural issues (Wang, Oakland, & Liu, 1992); mothers' and adolescents' views of authority and autonomy (Chen-Gaddini, 2012); developmental outcomes (Mellor, 1990; Falbo & Polit, 1986); peer relationships (Yucel & Downey, 2015); academic outcomes and psychosocial adjustment (Chen & Liu, 2014); perceived health, life satisfaction as well as violent and altruistic behaviour (Kwan & Ip, 2009); the impact of parental responsiveness on psychological distress and delinquency (Liu, Lin, & Chen, 2010); subjective well-being (Maheshwari & Jamal, 2015); health, cognition and non-cognitive outcomes (Zhou et al., 2016); fear, anxiety and depression (Yang et al., 1995); peer-related social competence (Kitzman, Cohen, & Lockwood, 2002); child perceptions of parental norms and sanctions (Kloepper, Leonard, & Huang, 1981); and also, physical and personality traits (Wang et al., 2000). Overall, whilst some of the aforementioned studies revealed differences between only and non-only children others reported little, if not any differences between the two groups. These differences are elaborated below in the domains of parenting and child-being, behavioural issues, peer relations, subjective well-being, academic outcomes and personality attributes.

Parenting and child wellbeing

Essentially, the parent-child relationship has been empirically supported as one of the main factors accounting for the positive developmental outcomes of the onlie (Mellor, 1990; Blake, 1989; Polit & Falbo, 1987; Mancillas, 2006).

Onlies . . . are more likely to have been planned and wanted, and more likely to command individual parental attention and interaction, than later borns and children in large families. Indeed, there is evidence that children in small families spend more individual time with their parents and that the quality of this time is relatively high (Polit & Falbo, 1987, p. 319).

Past research found that parents of only-children engaged in more child-centredness and spent more time including leisure time with their child than parents of multiple children (Chow & Zhao, 1996). Liu, Lin and Chen (2010) identified higher levels of parental responsiveness leading to lower levels of psychological distress and delinquency in one-child families than in multiple-children families. Interestingly, early studies such as Connors (1963) found that only children generally had less needs for connection with others and social belongingness as a result of experiencing less affection deprivation from their parents. Mellor (1990) also noted differences between only-children, later-borns and children from multiple-children families. Only children benefited from more positive developmental outcomes than later-borns and children from larger family units. As such, only-child uniqueness explanations are questionable along with only-child deprivation explanations. Furthermore, based on a quantitative review of six meta-analyses which included 115 studies, Falbo and Polit (1986) concluded that developmental outcomes for only children and the parent-child relationship quality varied in comparison to later-borns and children from larger families.

However, the aforementioned review found no differences in developmental outcomes (measured on levels of intelligence, achievement, adjustment, sociability and character) as well as on qualities of the parent-child relationship between only children, firstborns as well as children from two-child families. Mellor (1990) also found no differences in developmental outcomes for

only-children, firstborns and children from two-child families. In terms of parental expectations, no differences between only and non-only children were found (Bush-Glenn, 1990). Similar views between adolescent onlies and those with siblings on parental authority and individual autonomy were recorded (Chen-Gaddini, 2012). No differences were noted in terms of child perceptions of parental norms and sanctions between only and non-only children (Kloepper, Leonard, & Huang, 1981).

Behavioural issues

Rosenfeld (1966) found that compared to first-borns, only children have significantly less needs for affiliation. Interestingly, more behavioural problems have been reported amongst only-children than non-only children (Wang, Oakland, & Liu, 1992) although Kwan and Ip (2009) reported less violent behaviours among only-children than their counterparts.

Peer relations

Yucel and Downey (2015) found no differences in peer relationships as a result of the only-child status. Similarly, Kitzman, Cohen and Lockwood (2002) did not find any significant differences between children with and without siblings in terms of close friendship frequency and friendship quality but only-children as a group scored lower on likeability in the class and were more likely to be victimised and aggressive than their peers.

Subjective well-being

Maheshwari and Jamal (2015) reported lower levels of positive affect, higher levels of negative affect along with lower levels of life satisfaction amongst only-children than those with siblings. By contrast, Yang et al. (1995) reported higher levels of anxiety, depression and fear in children with siblings than those without. Singletons also scored higher on somatic complaints than children with siblings (Wang et al., 2000). Interestingly, other research reported higher life satisfaction among only-children than their peers (Kwan & Ip, 2009). However, no differences in psychosocial adjustment were identified between the two groups (Chen & Liu, 2014).

Academic outcomes

While Kwan and Ip (2009) reported higher performance among only-children than their counterparts, no differences in academic outcomes were revealed by Chen and Liu (2014). An updated review of research on only-children (mainly in China with a few studies in the US) concluded that on average, only children tend to score higher than non-only children in relation to academic abilities and achievements although differences are small (Falbo, 2012). More recently, Zhou et al. (2016) found only-children to perform less well than children with siblings on a cognitive level.

Personality attributes

There is a general perception that onlies remain more independent than children who have siblings (Thompson, 1974). Bellerose (1927) observed temper tantrums in only children and found them to be more frequent in children with siblings. Fenton (1928) studied school aged only children and found that his sample was less nervous and displayed more leadership skills than children with siblings but were more inclined to be less popular. However, reviews of early US studies concluded that there are no significant differences between only and non-only children on personality attributes (Blake, 1981; Thompson, 1974).

Similarities between only children and other children, in particular those having only one sibling, has been the most significant finding of methodologically robust studies on only children in Britain. It was also noted that a large proportion of existing research evidence on only children, other than from China, is from American families (Laybourn, 1994). Interestingly, there seem to be more similarities than differences between British only-children and American only-children than between British only-children and Chinese only-children. Therefore, future studies on only-children should expand to both western and non-western countries as the outcomes are expected to be different.

Falbo (1982) identified several important factors that could affect the developmental outcomes of only children including cultural expectations concerning only children, reason/s for having an only child mostly regarding parents' voluntariness, number of adults in the family and the age of the child.

With regards to the first factor, negative stereotyping of only-children can increase the likelihood of adults perceiving negative behaviours from them. Parents of an only-child may feel pressured to devote as much care and attention as they would have spent on several children. However, by overinvesting in their child parents may foster a sense of selfishness and dependence in them. On the other hand, if parents mutually agreed to have only one child they are then more likely to treat their child fairly with reasonable control, not engage in overprotective behaviours and grant more autonomy to the child. Subsequently, these parenting attitudes can help to pave the way for the formation of an independent child. Falbo states that it is important to consider the number of adults in the family given that only-children come from intact families as well as a growing number of lone-parent families. In terms of the child's age, differences in developmental outcomes between only and non-only children should be assessed in line with their developmental stage. For example, findings from adult only-children cannot be generalised to younger singletons (Falbo, 1982).

As far as personality attributes and the social behaviour of only children are concerned, findings are inconsistent. Importantly, Falbo emphasised the need to explore any inconsistent findings in relation to maturational effects as well as the demographic characteristics of the samples in order to recognise the influence of factors other than the absence of siblings on developmental outcomes.

After 34 years of studying only children, I recommend that we consider the heterogeneity within the only-child category (Falbo, 2012, p. 47).

A very recent study by Liu, Chen, Yang and Hu (2017) reiterated this point by empirically confirming that the heterogeneity of one-child families, mostly in relation to demographic characteristics, does influence the relationship between the only-child status and both cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes. A quantitative synthesis of existing studies on Chinese only-children and psychopathology by Falbo and Hooper (2015) concluded that there are only small significant differences between onlies and children with siblings regardless of the scale used to assess symptoms (e.g. anxiety and depression) with only-children displaying fewer symptoms than non-only children.

Despite mounting evidence that only children also benefit from various positive outcomes people still find it hard to accept that these children are happy and well-adjusted Newman (2001). McKibben (1998) stated that although only-children are primarily happy and satisfied as young individuals, the one major concern raised is loneliness in later life. Further support for the supposition that only-children are likely to be lonely comes from Wei (2005) who confirmed that although Chinese late adolescents felt closer to their parents, they also felt lonelier than adolescents with siblings. Drawing conclusions from data on 15-year old students from 31 countries, Choi and Monden (2017) highlighted that the general trend seems to be that only children mostly perform better in those countries where small family units are 'becoming the norm'. Perhaps this also suggests that developmental outcomes for only-children are also influenced by the level of acceptance and/or commonness of the single-child family type in the society.

Results pertaining to the developmental outcomes of only children are mixed. Importantly, studies on the developmental outcomes of British only-children with a focus on young adolescents are extremely limited. Therefore, the next section outlines existing research on adolescent only-children and their developmental outcomes.

4.2.3 Adolescent only-children

Falbo (1982) drew attention to the phase of adolescence as one which also underlies growing maturity and argued that this can contribute towards erasing differences in developmental outcomes between only children and a non-only children over time. For example, while only children learn about the importance of caring for and sharing with others in order to maintain friendship ties as they grow up, children with siblings also discover the need to develop sophisticated skills that would help them communicate with their peers. Therefore, from a developmental perspective it seems plausible to assert that age can limit differences between these two groups of children with different sibling status.

There is very little research on adolescent only children. Guilford and Worcester (1930) compared only children to children with siblings in US using early adolescents with a mean age of 12.9 years. However, parenting in relation to developmental outcomes of the adolescent only children was not explored.

Falbo and Polit (1986) investigated the developmental outcomes of only-children versus non-only children with a specific focus on adolescents aged 11-19 in Los Angeles. However, this age range conceptualises the phase of adolescence as a single developmental stage and not one reflecting different stages with different developmental needs. This is addressed in the current study with a focus on early adolescence (11-14 years) only. When investigating dysfunction in the single-parent and only-child family Bayrakal and Kope (1990) also used adolescents who were in the age range of 13-16 but no reference was made to the exploration of the mothers' parenting styles or the impact of parenting on the well-being of the adolescent only children. More recently, the study of Choi and Monden (2017) which adopted a cross-national perspective to explore the socioeconomic status and performance outcomes of singletons relied on a large sample of only children in middle adolescence (15 years) only.

In China and other Asian countries early adolescents in the age range of 12 to 14 have been studied (e.g. Chen-Gaddini, 2012; Liu, Lin, & Chen, 2010; Chen, Liu, & Li, 2000; Liu, Chen, Yang, & Hu, 2017). However, young adolescent only-children in the 11-14 age group are yet to be researched in the UK.

4.2.3.1 Parent-child relationships and the well-being of adolescent only-children

Research on the association between parenting and the psychological well-being of only-children including adolescents is scarce, with some studies from China. For example, findings of reduced life satisfaction among Chinese adolescent only-children who experience conflict with their parents; a reflection of poor family functioning which is subsequently related to behavioural issues, mental health problems, delinquency and substance abuse (Shek, 2002). In their review article Lim and Lim (2004) concluded that there is a significant relationship between parenting, in particular parental warmth, and positive adolescent psychosocial outcomes in Chinese and Chinese immigrant families. However, the impact of parental control on adolescent psychosocial outcomes in families from a Chinese background was not clear-cut. Based on a systematic review of 22 studies involving adolescents, Waite, Whittington and Creswell (2014) found that overall there was a positive relationship between anxiety

symptoms and parental control, although the association between adolescent anxiety and perceived parental rejection as well as low parental warmth was less consistent. However, there are still gaps in knowledge pertaining to the relevance of the above finding in the context of adolescent only-children in western societies.

This chapter outlines the current research status of single-child families on a global level with the conclusion that this family type has received very limited empirical attention in the UK. The nature of single-child families is described while also highlighting the negative stereotyping of this family type in terms of having a negative impact on parent-child relationships and child wellbeing. Existing research (relatively scarce and mostly in China) on the parenting of only-children draws considerable attention to overprotective parenting; parental permissiveness; pampering and overindulgence; and also, child-centredness characterising this family type. However, no one common parenting style has been attributed as being unique to the one-child families. This chapter also identified factors such as parent and child gender influencing parenting in this family type. Furthermore there are existing concerns about the developmental outcomes of only-children including adolescent onlies, especially in comparison to children with siblings. Both similarities and differences between these two groups are identified. Findings are mixed in the domains of parenting and child well-being, social behaviour, peer relationships, subjective wellbeing, academic outcomes and personality attributes. The developmental outcomes of onlies can also be affected by several factors such as family structure, the age of the child and the reason/s for having an only-child. Importantly, this chapter points towards the dearth of research exploring the link between adolescent only-children's wellbeing and parenting with no empirical attention given to early adolescent singletons yet. Therefore, the next chapter will provide an overview of the present study with the research aims and objectives also presented.

CHAPTER V: THE CURRENT RESEARCH

5.1 Rationale

My interest in this specific research area finds strong support in the recognition of the growing population of single-child families in developed countries including the UK. Nearly half of British families are classified as single-child families showing a gradual but steady increase in this family type (see chapters 1 and 2). As an only-child myself I have always been intrigued about the experience of only children as a unique group. My curiosity about onlies is not limited to their experience living as a single child but also their experience of being parented. UK studies on only children are scant. Parenting forums involving one-child families are growing in UK. However, parents of an only child seem to lack evidence-based information on the parenting aspects of an only-child; a concern which is continuously flagged by them. Furthermore the association between their parenting and the well-being of the only-child is yet to be examined in research. Such research can ultimately contribute towards developing adequate parenting support services for these families if required. Therefore the current study aims to address the aforementioned gaps in knowledge on parenting and wellbeing of children in single-child families in UK.

5.2 Overview

This study uses a mixed-methods approach with an embedded design to examine parenting in one-child families and its association with the well-being of adolescent only-children. One-child families are reflective of ‘beanpole’ families which are smaller families characterised by a vertical structure with more family generations although with fewer number of children in each generation (Bengtson, 2001). Data (quantitative and qualitative) was collected from single-child and multiple-children families with an adolescent aged 11 to 14. Mothers and fathers as well as adolescents participated in this research. Three data collection methods were used: 1) online surveys, 2) qualitative semi-structured interviews, and 3) observational assessment of parent-child interaction. At both the quantitative and qualitative stages of inquiry, the perspectives of the adolescents, as well as the parents were explored. The main objective of using multiple methods to collect data from families was to develop a research process characterised by continuity

with the inclusion of a variety of methods that can help to compensate for the limitations of a single method. Survey data was used in conjunction with interview and observation data, which all together contribute towards enhancing data richness.

5.2.1 Online surveys

In the form of a self-designed anonymous online survey, a series of standardised questionnaires were put together to identify parenting styles, parenting practices, and measure the well-being of the single child in comparison with adolescents who have sibling/s. Parents filled in questionnaires measuring their perceived parenting as well as the wellbeing of their child, which were then compared to the adolescents' perception of their own experience of being parented and their well-being assessed separately. The inclusion of a cohort of multiple-children families allowed a comparison between the parenting style and practices, and adolescent well-being, reported in this group and the single-child family.

Aims

The purpose of these online surveys is three-fold. First, to identify any significant relationship between parenting and number of children; second, to assess the relationships between the patterns of parenting and the psychological well-being variables and third, to investigate any differences in parenting and adolescent wellbeing in relation to the demographic characteristics of the families including child and parent gender and family structure.

5.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews with a series of open-ended questions were prepared based on the literature review. In both the one-child and multiple-children families, a joint interview was conducted with the parents while the adolescent was interviewed separately. Common themes and contrasting themes as well as themes specific to each family type were identified in the qualitative section of the analytic process.

This section is specifically designed to explore the adolescent's experience of being an only-child and the extent to which parenting differs based on the

child's and the parent's gender in this family type. This method also helped to capture whether there are any commonalities that cut across the gender element in both family types. The concept of child-centred parenting, one believed to be highly applicable to one-child families (see chapter 2) was explored qualitatively using questions specifically designed based on existing literature on this type of parenting. This qualitative approach intended to shed light on child-centred parenting and also pave the way for future research to use the findings to perhaps develop and test a scale that could be used to measure this construct.

Aims

The purpose of the qualitative approach was to explore the following areas in both groups:

1. The adolescent's experience of being an only-child (single-child families) OR having a sibling (multiple-children families)
2. The influence of parent and child gender on parenting (both family types)
3. The experience of child-centred parenting (both family types)

5.2.3 Observational assessment of parent-child interaction

An observational approach based on a standardised play situation to gain insight in parent-child interaction made up the third and last section of this study. Both mother-adolescent and father-adolescent interactions were assessed using the Etch a Sketch; a toy used to draw pictures with two knobs; one allowing horizontal while the other vertical lines to be drawn.

Aim

The aim of this observational activity was to examine the degree of control underlying parent-child interactions in single-child families in comparison to multiple-children families.

5.3 Research questions

The research questions are broken down as follows:

1. Parenting

- i. How do the parenting styles and practices used in single-child families compare to those in multiple children families?
 - ii. How does parenting vary with child gender, parent gender and family structure?
- 2. Parenting and adolescent well-being
 - i. To what extent is parenting associated with the well-being of adolescents?
 - ii. How does it vary in single-child families and multiple children families in the domains of:
 - Subjective well-being and self-compassion
 - Peer relationships

The next chapter explains the methodological approach of the present study with a focus on the research design, participant information, sampling strategies, instruments used, procedure and data analysis methods.

CHAPTER VI: METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research approach: Mixed-methods

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to gain a more in-depth insight into the parenting and well-being of adolescents in one-child families. Multiple data collection methods combine the strengths of all individual methods while simultaneously compensating for the limitations of one single method. The main rationale for the mixed-methods approach adopted in this study is to seek complementarity. That is, to clarify and illustrate findings from one method with the use of a different method (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989).

There are several advantages of the mixed-methods approach, but particularly relevant here is its sensitivity to develop a more comprehensive understanding of complex topics that are reliant on the interaction of different perspectives (Gelo, Braakmann, & Benetka, 2008); in this case, parent and child perspectives on parenting. Yoshikawa, Weisner, Kalil and Way (2008) strongly advocated for the adoption of the mixed- methods approach in parenting research as doing so respects the dynamic nature and cultural specificity of parenting while also recognising that parenting practices are often better reflected in a physical context and less accurately measured using surveys. Nonetheless parenting studies based on a mixed methods approach do not seem to be numerous.

6.1.1 Embedded design

The current research used an embedded design with a two-phase approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Quantitative methods were applied separately from the qualitative methods to different samples and at different stages of the research process. That said, the qualitative sample also contributed to the quantitative data. The main purpose of using this design was to incorporate a qualitative section that could support the quantitative findings (Creswell et al., 2003). In line with Gelo, Braakmann and Benetka (2008), the aim was also to include qualitative data to answer specific research questions within a broader quantitative based research question.

These broad research questions are: 1) is there any significant relationship between parenting and number of children? 2) are there any significant

associations between the patterns of parenting and adolescent well-being?; 3) are there any differences in parenting and adolescent wellbeing in relation to the demographic characteristics of the families? 4) what is the degree of control underlying parenting in single-child families in comparison to multiple-children families? Findings answering all the above contributed towards addressing the overarching research questions of this study which relate to how parenting styles and practices used in single-child families compare to those in multiple children families and how these vary with child gender, parent gender and family structure; and also, the extent to which parenting is associated with the well-being of adolescents and how this varies in single-child families and multiple children families.

The specific research questions addressed by the qualitative approach are: 1) what is the adolescent's experience of being an only-child or a child with sibling/s? 2) is there any influence of parent and child gender on parenting? (both family types); and, 3) what is the experience of child-centred parenting (both family types)? To illustrate, while surveys were used to assess the relationship between family type (one-child vs. multiple-children) and parenting, the qualitative interviews specifically probed into child-centred parenting and the influence of child and parent gender on parenting in both family types. Altogether, findings answering the above more specific research questions also contributed towards a more in-depth understanding of how parenting used in single-child families compare to those in multiple children families and how these vary with child gender, parent gender and family structure. The interviews and parent-adolescent interaction task helped to get closer to the 'reality' of the participants in their own family setting.

6.1.2 Participants

6.1.2.1 Recruitment

Psychological studies on only-children have been restricted to rather small sample sizes (Falbo & Polit, 1986). Although this study initially anticipated to address this issue by including 200-300 adolescent only-children aged between 11-14 years and their parents as well as 200-300 adolescents who have only one sibling, such proved to be impossible. Several recruitment methods were used

such as online ads (see Appendix 1) on various websites (e.g. Warwick University's staff hub and parenting network; Tutoring agency; Mumsnet, Netmums; only.child.org.uk; One Parent Families Scotland; Only Child Project), distribution of flyers in different family leisure centres across the UK (mainly in London, Coventry and Birmingham), and also, word of mouth. Initially contacts were also made with schools via email as well as in person to recruit families but without any success over a three month period. Participant recruitment for this study was extremely time consuming given that mothers, fathers and their adolescent were all required to take part. Following a low response rate from the first online family survey, a separate online survey specifically targeting mothers on Mumsnet and Netmums was created. After an initial assessment of the response rate of both surveys combined together, the sample size was still quite small. Subsequently, with the help of the paid participant recruitment service offered by Qualtrics, an additional of 25 eligible adolescent only-children and an equal number of adolescents with only one sibling were recruited along with 40 mothers (20 SCF & 20 NSCF) and 40 fathers (20 SCF & 20 NSCF). As such, the final sample for the survey data analysis comprised participants from the three surveys combined together.

For the interview phase all families were recruited using convenience and snowballing sampling strategies (e.g. word of mouth, involvement of research assistants in recruitment and also, online ads). Although it was initially intended to recruit families from diverse cultural backgrounds to increase representativeness of the data (especially in a UK context), unfortunately this was not achieved given that it again proved to be very challenging and time consuming to recruit families whereby the mother, father as well as the adolescent were available and willing to be interviewed.

6.1.2.2 Sample characteristics

Online surveys

For one-child families, 31 adolescents, 47 mothers and 25 fathers completed the online surveys. For multiple-child families, 46 adolescents, 76 mothers and 31 fathers participated. All adolescent participants were aged 11-14

years. Demographic details of adolescent survey participants by family type are provided in table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Adolescents by Family Type

	Single-Child		Non-Single Child			
Demographic variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Age (years)	12.35	1.17	12.98	1.15	-2.32	< .05
	N	%	N	%	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Gender					.958	n.s.
Males	17	54.8	20	43.5		
Females	14	45.2	26	56.5		
Family Structure					1.39	n.s.
Two-parents (both biological)	21	67.7	31	67.4		
Two-parents (one step)	4	12.9	8	17.4		

Single-parent	6	19.4	6	13.0		
Other	0	0	1	2.20		
Ethnicity					1.81	n.s.
White/Caucasian	25	80.6	35	76.1		
Black/African/Carribean	3	9.70	2	4.30		
Asian	3	9.70	3	6.50		
Other	0	0	6	13.0		

There were no differences between the two family types for child gender, family structure and ethnicity. However, there was a significant difference between only children and non-only children for age such that adolescents in the non-single child group were slightly older, so the effect of child age was explored in later analyses.

Demographic details of mothers by family type are provided in table 2 below.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Mothers by Family Type

	Single-Child		Non-Single Child			
Demographic variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Age of adolescent (years)	12.68	1.13	12.91	.996	-1.17	n.s.
	N	%	N	%	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Age of mother (years)					.845	n.s.
< or equal to 21	0	0	1	1.30		
22 - 34	4	8.50	8	10.5		
35 - 44	22	46.8	33	43.4		
45 - 54	20	42.6	32	42.1		
55 - 64	1	2.10	2	2.60		

Child gender					.832	n.s.
Males	25	53.2	34	44.7		
Females	22	46.8	42	55.3		
Family Structure					.804	n.s.
Two-parents (both biological)	28	59.6	48	63.2		
Two-parents (one step)	6	12.8	10	13.2		
Single-parent	12	25.5	15	19.7		
Other	1	2.10	3	3.90		
Ethnicity					2.86	n.s.
White/Caucasian	44	93.6	71	93.4		
Black/African/Carribean	0	0	1	1.3		

Asian	3	6.40	2	2.60		
Other	0	0	2	2.60		
Educational Qualification					3.27	n.s.
Pre-university (GCSE/A Level)	19	40.4	21	27.6		
Vocational training	6	12.8	11	14.5		
Undergraduate	8	17.0	21	27.6		
Postgraduate	11	23.4	16	21.1		
Other	3	6.40	7	9.20		

Regarding mothers' self-reports, no differences were found between one-child and multiple-children families for child age, child gender, mother's age, family structure, ethnicity and educational qualification.

Demographic details of fathers by family type are provided in table 3 below.

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Fathers by Family Type

	Single-Child		Non-Single Child			
Demographic variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Age of adolescent (years)	12.80	1.00	12.68	1.19	.410	n.s.
	N	%	N	%	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Age of father (years)					5.50	n.s.
< or equal to 21	0	0	0	0		
22 - 34	6	24.0	4	12.9		
35 - 44	6	24.0	10	32.3		
45 - 54	12	48.0	10	32.3		
55 - 64	1	4.00	7	22.6		

Child gender					1.17	n.s.
Males	18	72.0	18	58.1		
Females	7	28.0	13	41.9		
Family Structure					1.72	n.s.
Two-parents (both biological)	18	72.0	21	67.7		
Two-parents (one step)	2	8.00	6	19.4		
Single-parent	5	20.0	4	12.9		
Other	0	0	0	0		
Ethnicity					.673	n.s.
White/Caucasian	24	96.0	28	90.3		
Black/African/Carribean	0	0	0	0		

Asian	1	4.00	3	9.70		
Other	0	0	0	0		
Educational Qualification					3.09	n.s.
Pre-university (GCSE/A Level)	11	44.0	14	45.2		
Vocational training	2	8.00	2	6.50		
Undergraduate	8	32.0	7	22.6		
Postgraduate	3	12.0	8	25.8		
Other	1	4.00	0	0		

Similar to mothers' self-reports, no differences were found between one-child and multiple-children families for child age, child gender, father's age, family structure, ethnicity and educational qualification for fathers' self-reports.

Interviews and observation of parent-child interaction

Seventy-six participants, from 15 single-child families (15 adolescents, 13 mothers and 8 fathers) as well as 15 multiple-children families (15 adolescents, 13 mothers and 12 fathers) were successfully recruited for the family interviews and included in the data analysis. Two family interviews were excluded from final analyses. In one, the adolescent singleton suffered from some form of cognitive impairment which could have had a significant impact on parenting. Another interview in the NSCF group was excluded on the basis of its very short duration and hence limited richness in data. Families came from across different places in UK and were mostly recruited from London, the West Midlands, Newcastle and Cambridge. The demographic details of the interviewed participants by family type are in table 4 below.

Forty-seven parent adolescent Etch-a-Sketch interactions were recorded including 13 mother-adolescent dyads and 8 father-adolescent dyads in one-child families as well as 13 mother-adolescent dyads and 13 father-adolescent dyads in multiple-children families.

Table 4: Demographic Characteristics of Families (N = 30; 15 SCF & 15 NSCF)

Demographic variable	Single-Child		Non-Single Child		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Age of adolescent (years)	12.27	1.10	12.33	1.29	-.152	n.s.
	N	%	N	%	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Child gender					.00	n.s.
Males	6	40.0	6	40.0		
Females	9	60.0	9	60.0		
Family Structure					9.56	< .05
Married	5	33.3	13	86.7		
Cohabiting	2	13.3	1	6.70		

Divorced & Single-parent	3	20.0	0	0		
Step-family	5	33.3	1	6.70		
Mothers' occupation					1.94	n.s.
Managers/Directors/Senior offices	2	13.3	2	13.3		
Professional occupations	3	20.0	5	33.3		
Technical occupations	1	6.70	1	6.70		
Administrative and secretarial	4	26.7	3	20.0		
Skilled trades occupations	1	6.70	1	6.70		
Self-employed	1	6.70	0	0		
Not employed	1	6.70	2	13.3		

Fathers' occupation					.232	n.s.
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Managers/Directors/Senior offices	3	20.0	5	33.3
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Professional occupations	3	20.0	3	20.0
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Technical occupations	2	13.3	3	20.0
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No differences were found between the single-child and non-single child families for child age, child gender and parental occupation. However, there was a significant difference for family structure such that more of the single child families were divorced or step families. Therefore the role played by family structure was carefully considered when interpreting and discussing the qualitative findings.

6.1.3 Quantitative phase

6.1.3.1 Online survey questionnaires

Standardised questionnaires were used to assess parenting styles, parenting practices, and adolescent well-being.

Parental measures

- *Demographic information*

Information was collected on parental age; number of children; the age and gender of the target adolescent; family structure (two-parent or single-parent); ethnic background; and parental educational qualification (see Appendix 2).

- *The Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire – Short Version (PSDQ; Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen, & Hart, 2001):*

The PSDQ is a 32-item parent report instrument identifying three parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative and permissive in line with Baumrind's parenting typologies (see Appendix 3). This is a shortened version of the original 62-item instrument and is made up of 15 authoritative items reflecting three dimensions, reasoning/induction – regulation (e.g. "I give my child reasons why rules should be obeyed"), warmth and support – connection (e.g. "I am responsive to my child's feelings and needs") and, democratic participation – autonomy granting (e.g. "I allow my child to give input into family rules"); 12 authoritarian items reflecting verbal hostility (e.g. "I explode in anger towards my child"), physical coercion (e.g. "I slap my child when the child misbehaves"), and nonreasoning/punitive strategies (e.g. "I use threats as punishment with little or no justification"); and five permissive items all reflecting indulgence and failure to follow through (e.g. "I find it difficult to discipline my child"). Items are answered on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *always*) with higher scores indicative of more regular use of the described parenting behaviour. The mean scores of all items for each of the domains measured by the specific parenting style scale (authoritarian, authoritative and permissive) were calculated. An overall mean was also calculated for each of the three parenting styles. Cronbach's alphas for items measuring the three parenting styles are (Robinson et

al., 2001): .86 (authoritative), .82 (authoritarian) and .64 (permissive). However, based on a review of the psychometric properties of the PSDQ the reliability and validity of this scale have not been widely reported (Olivari, Tagliabue, & Confalonieri, 2013).

- *The Parents of Adolescents Separation Anxiety Scale (PASAS*; Hock et al., 2001):

The PASAS is a 35-item questionnaire assessing parents' feelings pertaining to separation from their adolescent children (see Appendix 4). It has two subscales: Anxiety about Adolescent Distancing (AAD) – 21 items (e.g. “It hurts my feelings when my teenager takes his/her problems to a good friend instead of to me”; “I feel most content when I know my child is sleeping under my roof”) and Comfort with Secure Base Role (CSBR) – 14 items (e.g. “I am happy when my teenager relies on me for advice about decisions”; “I like knowing that my teenager will come to me when he/she feels upset”). Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Higher scores on AAD indicate more anxiety about adolescent distancing while higher scores on CSBR indicate parents' satisfaction in terms of providing physical support, emotional support and guidance to their adolescent. Seven items are reverse coded across both subscales following which sum scores of each of the two subscales are calculated separately. An internal consistency of .88 was found for AAD and .81 for CSBR. Interfactor correlations also confirmed that these two factors are relatively independent ($r = .17$ for mothers' reports and $r = .20$ for fathers' reports). A series of validity studies concluded that separation anxiety and attachment were linked (Hock et al., 2001).

- *The Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS-PC*; Straus et al., 1998):

This 22-item questionnaire measures parental discipline behaviours (see Appendix 5). The main scales of the CTS-PC assess nonviolent discipline (4 items), psychological aggression (5 items), and physical assault (13 items). For this study only items measuring nonviolent discipline (e.g., “Explained why something was wrong”) and psychological aggression (e.g., “Swore or curse at him/her”) were included. An 8-point Likert scale (1 = *once in the past year*; 2 =

twice in the past year; 3 = 3-5 times in the past year; 4 = 6-10 times in the past year; 5 = 11-20 times in the past year; 6 = more than 20 times in the past year; 7 = if you haven't done it in the past year but have done it before that; 8 = this has never happened) rates the number of times the parent engaged in specific behaviours. For scoring, midpoints were calculated for each response categories as follows: for categories 0, 1, and 2 the midpoints are the same as the response category numbers. For category 3 (3–5 times) a midpoint of 4 is given; for category 4 (6–10 times) the midpoint is 8; for category 5 (11–20 times) the midpoint is 15; for category 6 (more than 20 times in the past year) the midpoint is 25; category 7 (has done it before) is scored 1 and category 8 (never happened) is scored 0. Higher scores indicate more frequent use of the described behaviour. Midpoints for all items in each of the two subscales were summed up separately. Alpha coefficient for psychological aggression is .60 and nonviolent discipline is .70. In terms of construct validity, a positive correlation between nonviolent aggression and psychological aggression was reported ($r = .53$) suggesting that when parents are faced with child misconduct they tend to rely on more than one disciplinary strategy (Straus et al., 1998).

Child measures

- *Demographic information*

Adolescents gave information on child age; gender; family structure (two-parent or single-parent); ethnic background; and number of siblings (see Appendix 1).

- *The Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ; Buri, 1991):*

This 30-item questionnaire measures adolescent views on parents' specific parenting style (see Appendix 6) using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). This is an adapted version of the questionnaire by Williams, Ciarrochi and Heaven (2012) with items modified for more clarity to suit early adolescents. The items measure Baumrind's (1971) three parenting styles: authoritarian (10 items – e.g. “My mother/father makes us conform to her way”), authoritative (10 items – e.g. “My mother/father directs our behaviour through talking with us and through discipline”) and permissive (10 items – e.g.

“My mother/father lets me get my own way”). For each parenting style a sum score of all items was calculated. Scores on each parenting variable can range from 10 to 50 with higher scores reflecting more frequent use of the described behaviour. Regarding internal consistency, Cronbach alpha values are as follows: .82 and .85 for mothers and fathers respectively (Authoritativeness), .85 and .87 for mothers and fathers respectively (Authoritarianism), .75 and .74 for mothers and fathers respectively (Permissiveness). Test-retest reliability based on a series of testing sessions over a two-week period resulted in the following reliabilities: .78 and .92 for mothers and fathers respectively (Authoritativeness), .86 and .85 for mothers and fathers respectively (Authoritarianism), .81 and .77 for mothers and fathers respectively (Permissiveness). As for the discriminant validity of this questionnaire, there is an inverse relationship between mother’s authoritarianism and permissiveness ($r = -.38, p < .001$) as well as authoritativeness ($r = -.48, p < .001$). There is no significant relationship between mothers’ permissiveness and authoritativeness ($r = .07, p > .10$). Similar patterns were reported for father’s data (Buri, 1991).

- *The Child–Parent Relationship Test (ChiP-C*; Titze & Lehmkuhl, 2010; Titze et al., 2010):

The ChiP-C questionnaire investigates the adolescent’s relationship to each parent (completed separately for mother and father - see Appendix 7). In this study the following subscales were included: cohesion (5 items – e.g. “When I needed my mother/father she/he has been there for me”), identification (4 items – e.g. “My mother’s/father’s opinion has been important to me”), autonomy (4 items – e.g. “My mother/father has given me the freedom to make my own choices”), conflict (4 items – e.g. “My mother/father has argued with me”), rejection and indifference (4 items – e.g. “My mother/father didn’t care about me”) and overprotection (4 items – e.g. “My mother/father has worried too much about me”). Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = *never* to 4 = *always*) except two items from the identification subscale rated 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*perfectly*). Higher scores reflect higher occurrence of the described behaviour. Mean scores of all the items in each of the six subscales were calculated. Cronbach alpha for the resource scales (cohesion, identification and autonomy) is

.79 and that for the risk scales (conflict, rejection/indifference and overprotection) is .82. Construct validity of the Chip-C questionnaire was confirmed based on reported inter-correlations (below an absolute value of .70) between corresponding scales. There is a significant negative association between the risk scales and the resource scales (Titze et al., 2010).

- *Life Satisfaction Scale (LIFE; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985):*

The LIFE questionnaire (a 5-item scale) measures adolescents' global perception of their quality of life (a component of subjective well-being - see Appendix 8). Adolescents rated the extent to which they agreed with each item using a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Items included: "In most ways my life is close to my ideal" and "I am satisfied with my life". A sum score was calculated for all the five items. Higher scores reflect a higher level of life satisfaction. This questionnaire scored high on internal consistency ranging from .79 to .87 (Diener, et al., 1985; Pavot et al., 1991). Test-retest reliability over a two-month period was .82. The item-total correlation for each item ranged from .57 to .75. The SWLS has also been shown to correlate with other subjective wellbeing scales - correlation coefficients ranging from .37 to .75 (Diener, et al., 1985).

- *The Self-Compassion Scale adapted for Children (SCS-C; Neff, 2003; modified by Lawlor, 2011):*

This adapted version was used as the wording of the items deemed best suited for young adolescents (see Appendix 9). The SCS-C has 12 items assessing components of self-compassion: Self-Kindness (2 items - e.g. "try to be kind towards those things about myself I don't like"), Self-Judgment (2 items - e.g. "I am hard on myself about my own flaws/weaknesses"), Common Humanity (2 items - e.g. "When I feel like I'm not good enough at something, I try to remind myself that everyone feels that way sometimes"), Isolation (2 items - e.g. "When I fail at something that's important to me, I feel like I'm all alone"), Mindfulness (2 items - e.g. "When something bad happens, I try not to focus only on the bad, but think about the good things as well") and Over-Identification (2 items - e.g. "When I'm feeling sad, I can't stop thinking about everything that's wrong"). It

uses a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *always*) and items (self-judgment, isolation and over-identification) are reverse coded. A total self-compassion mean score is calculated. Higher scores indicate a higher level of self-compassion. This questionnaire is a shorter version of the original 26 item questionnaire with a near perfect correlation ($r = .97$) established with the original version (Neff, 2003). Cronbach alpha for this questionnaire is .86. The validity of this questionnaire was confirmed with reference to the same six-factor structure and only one higher-order factor of self-compassion as the long form SCS (Raes, Pommier, Neff, & Van Gucht, 2011).

- *Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA; Harter, 1988; 2012):*

This 45-item questionnaire assesses adolescents' perceptions of competence in eight areas. In the current study, only the social acceptance/competence and close friendship subscales (5 items each) were included to investigate peer relationships and friendship quality (see Appendix 10). For each item, adolescents first decide which of two statements mostly correspond to them (e.g. "Some teenagers find it hard to make friends, BUT for other teenagers it's pretty easy"), and then rate how true that statement applies to them. Items are rated from 1 to 4 (4 = *really true for me*; 3 = *sort of true for me*; 2 = *sort of true for me*; 1 = *really true for me* for positively keyed items and reversed for negatively keyed). A score of 1 refers to the lowest level of perceived competence or adequacy whilst 4 indicates the highest perceived competence or adequacy. Scores were summed up for each subscale. Cronbach alpha for social acceptance ranges from .79 to .90 and that for close friendship ranges from .79 to .85. Convergent validity has been demonstrated with Self-Description questionnaires (Marsh, 1988; 1990) with subscales of similar content to the Harter Scale. The social competence subscale positively correlates with their peer relations subscale ($r = .68$).

Joint measures

- *The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997):*

The SDQ (4-17 year old version) is a 25-item questionnaire with five subscales of five items assessing the presence or absence of emotional and

behavioural problems (see Appendices 11 and 12). Sub-scales cover emotional symptoms (e.g. “Often unhappy, downhearted”), conduct problems (e.g. “Often fights with other children”), hyperactivity (e.g., “Restless, overactive”), peer problems (e.g., “Picked on or bullied”) and pro-social behaviour (e.g., “Considerate of other people's feelings”). Responses are rated on a 3-point Likert scale (0 = *not true*, 1 = *somewhat true* and 2 = *certainly true*). Five items were reverse scored before the total difficulties score was calculated by adding the scores of all the scales excluding the prosocial scale. The sum score of each of the five individual scales was also calculated. For each scale the score can range from 0 to 10. The SDQ Impact questionnaire (5 items) was also included. This section assesses overall distress and impairment relating to home life, friendships, classroom learning and leisure activities. All responses are rated on a 3-point Likert scale: 0 (*not at all or only a little*), 1 (*a medium amount*) and 2 (*a great deal*). A sum score for the impact items was calculated and this ranges from 0 to 10. Regarding internal consistency, mean Cronbach alpha in a British sample including adolescents aged 11 to 15 was .73. Cross-informant correlation was .34 (mean) and retest stability following a period of four to six month was .62 (mean). Hence the SDQ has good reliability and validity when used with adolescents (Goodman, 2001).

6.1.3.2 Parent-adolescent interaction assessment using the Etch-a-Sketch (AMCIES)

Mother-adolescent and father-adolescent interactions were examined in a standardised play situation using the Etch a Sketch (AMCIES) developed by Wolke et al. (1995; Wolke & Meyer, 2000; Wolke et al., 2001). A growing number of studies have used this instrument to gain insight into parenting based on observational data across different age groups (e.g.s. Jaekel, Wolke, & Chernova, 2012; Jaekel, Pluess, Belsky, & Wolke, 2014; Schneider et al., 2009; Iqbal, 2012).

The parent-child interaction was examined using the standardized coding manual, the “Assessment of Mother-Child-Interaction with the Etch-a-Sketch (AMCIES)” originally developed by Wolke et al. (1995; Wolke & Meyer, 2000; Wolke et al., 2001). A coding sheet was developed to facilitate the recording of

the scores for each video (see Appendix 13). The AMCIES coding system is made up of several observation scales. For example, the duration of the play activity, number of times a new start is initiated by either the child or the parent, number of times a dial is taken over by either the child or the parent, whether or not the participants have used the Etch-a-Sketch tablet prior to undertaking this task, the order in which the play task was administered (mother-adolescent dyad followed by father-adolescent dyad and vice-versa) and also, the quality of drawing ranging from low to high (PW1 = very bad drawing - PW5 = very nice house). This manual also consists of parent, child and interaction scales.

- 1) Parent scales (9): *amount/frequency of verbal control* (1 = very high – 9 = highly minimal); *amount/frequency of non-verbal control* (1 = very high – 9 = highly minimal) both of which to assess the extent to which the parent engages in controlling behaviours; *amount/frequency of criticism* (1 = very often – 5 = never) characterised by undermining comments/gestures directed towards the child; *sensitivity* (1 = a lack of sensitivity – 5 = highly sensitive) assessing the parent's ability to both read and respond to the child's cues; *amount/frequency of rough physical handling* of the child by the parent (1 = frequently – 3 = Never); *amount/frequency of dissatisfaction* (1 = very dissatisfied – 5 = never dissatisfied) assessing the extent to which the parent shows dissatisfaction towards himself/herself as well as in terms of the overall dyadic performance; *amount/frequency of satisfaction* (1 = never expresses satisfaction – 5 = expresses satisfaction 4 times) assessing the extent to which the parent expresses satisfaction towards himself/herself as well as in terms of the overall dyadic performance; *emotional condition* (1 = very unhappy and irritable – 9 = very happy) reflecting the extent to which the parent is happy or irritable during the play activity; *amount/frequency of vocalisation* (1 = mainly quiet – 5 = excessive talking).
- 2) Child scales (8): *amount/frequency of dissatisfaction* (1 = very dissatisfied – 5 = never dissatisfied); *amount/frequency of satisfaction* (1 = never expresses satisfaction – 5 = expresses satisfaction 4 times); *emotional condition* (1 = very unhappy and irritable – 9 = very happy);

amount/frequency of criticism (1 = very often – 5 = never) characterised by undermining comments/gestures directed towards the parent; *persistence and attention span* (1 = very low – 9 = very high) reflecting the degree to which the child pursues the task with interest, attention and perseverance; *level of activity* (1 = very still – 9 = over-active) relating to the level of physical activity of the child during the game; *readiness for social interaction* (1 = being ignorant – 9 = actively engaged) assessing the extent to which the child engages in active social reactions with the parent in order to complete the task or shows passive and anti-social reactions while on task; *amount/frequency of vocalisation* (1 = mainly quiet – 5 = excessive talking).

- 3) Parent and child interaction scales (2): *harmony* (1 = many conflicts – 9 = plenty of harmony) assessing the amount of conflict in the parent-child interaction; *control of the interaction process* (1 = child has absolute control of the game – 9 = parent has absolute control of the game) assessing the extent to which the child or the parent is in control of the situation and who ultimately determines the outcome of the game.

The researcher and a colleague were trained in using this observational technique and analysing the data by Professor Wolke. To assess inter-rater reliability, 25% of the researcher's videos were coded by this second researcher.

6.1.4 Qualitative phase

6.1.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews with the adolescent and the parents were conducted. Adolescents were interviewed separately from their parents to get closer to their self-constructed reality of their experience of being parented. Separate interviews are recommended in research whereby participants require some freedom to express themselves independently (LaRossa, Bennett, & Gelles, 1981 as cited in Valentine, 1999). Joint parent interviews were conducted to gain an insight into the experience of both parents in both family types. It was anticipated that allowing both the mother and the father to 'chip in' would enhance the quality of the data. In fact, Valentine (1999, p. 68) emphasised the

importance and usefulness of interviewing different household members in family research in order to have a better insight into “shared realities”. The main advantage of conducting dual parent interviews is that it helps couples to engage in mediation and negotiation leading to the creation of one collaborative account that helps the interviewer to better tap into the dynamics of family relations than if it was a one-to-one separate interview (Baruch & Barnett, 1986; Valentine, 1999). In joint interviews couples are able to corroborate or even challenge each other’s views on topics and ultimately “richer, more detailed and validated accounts” are provided (Valentine, 1999, p. 68; Lycett, Daniels, Curson, & Golombok, 2005). Moreover dual parent interviews have also proved to be useful in capturing differences in mothers’ and fathers’ perspectives (e.g. Lycett, Daniels, Curson, & Golombok, 2005; Lowes, Gregory, & Lyne, 2005); an important issue to consider in parenting research (see chapter 2).

The interview schedule included a demographic section (see Appendix 14) asking adolescent’s age, gender, sibling status, family structure and parental occupation. For adolescent interviews, 15 open-ended questions were developed based on existing literature. These questions probed into the parent-adolescent relationship (e.g. “what is it like to live with your mum/dad?”), their experience of being an only child or non-only child (e.g. “what is it like to be an ‘only child’/what is it like to have a brother or a sister?”), their perceptions of their counterparts and their relationships with their parents (e.g. “would you say that your friends who have brothers or sisters have a similar or different relationship with their mum/dad as compared to your relationship with your mum/dad?”), and their experience of being parented (e.g. “how much freedom do you have to do things by yourself?”/ “if your mum/dad knows that you like something and want to have it what does she/he do or say about it?”) (see Appendix 15). Likewise for parental interview, 15 open-ended questions were developed to probe all of the above from the parents’ perspective and the reasons why they have either a single child or more than one (see Appendix 16).

6.2 Procedure

6.2.1 Surveys

All survey questionnaires were set up online using Qualtrics software platform. Although the Stephenson Multigroup Acculturation Scale (SMAS; Stephenson, 2000) was also included in the survey, as a result of a very low response rate, data from this questionnaire was not included in data analysis. Prior to filling in the questionnaires participants were presented with an online information sheet detailing the aims and purpose of the current study, and assuring data confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw. Parents were also provided with an informed consent form to confirm their own participation and give permission for their adolescent to take part (see Appendix 17). Adolescents were presented with an assent form (see Appendix 18). Three different survey sections were created so each group of participants (i.e. mothers, fathers and adolescents) accessed only the relevant questionnaires. After completing the questionnaires, participants were presented with a debrief that reminded them of the right to withdraw their data within two weeks of survey completion (see Appendix 19). In order to limit the issue of missing data, the survey was set up using the *forced response* option. All questionnaires which were only partially filled (no questionnaire fully completed) were discarded. Families who successfully completed all three sets of questionnaires and who were interested in taking part in a prize draw were invited to contact the researcher for a chance to win a £50 leisure gift voucher as a thank you gift. Surveys took approximately 20-40 minutes to complete for both the adolescent and the parent. Mothers and fathers were given the option to leave their email if they wished to take part in the family interview phase of the study.

6.2.2 Family interviews

Most family interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants although a few families were interviewed at the university. The adolescent was interviewed first followed by the joint interview of the parents. On average the adolescent interview lasted 30-40 minutes while the parent interview lasted 40-45 minutes. Although fathers in intact families in both family types were encouraged to also participate, some fathers were less available than mothers and hence did not take part. Before the start of the parent interview, parents were given an

information sheet and were requested to sign a parents' consent form (see Appendix 17). Adolescents were provided with an assent form (see Appendix 18). All interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. At the end of the interview, the participants were also encouraged to fill in the survey questionnaires if they had not done so.

6.2.3 Parent-child standardised play situation

Following the interviews families took part in the parent-child observation play activity. The adolescent was paired with the mother followed by the father and each dyad was requested to copy a house template using the Etch-a-Sketch. Prior to the start of the observation each dyad was also allowed some time to practice using the Etch-a-Sketch. Each parent-adolescent dyad was then given approximately 10 minutes to complete the house. To ensure the administration of the task in a standardised fashion, the parent was always assigned the left knob to draw horizontal lines while the child was requested to use the right knob to draw vertical lines. Diagonal lines could also be drawn by twisting both knobs together. All families were requested to complete this drawing activity on a table (as far as possible) with the parent sitting on the right and the adolescent on the left. Clear instructions on how to use the Etch-a-Sketch by collaborating with each other were given to each parent-child dyad. They were also reminded that each was not allowed to touch the dial of the other while completing the task and that, as far as possible, the researcher would not be able to intervene by answering any question while they were doing the task. This ensured that the parent-adolescent interaction when on task was not 'contaminated' by the presence of the researcher. They were also informed that if they wished to start all over again they could shake the tablet to erase the drawing and start a new one.

With the permission of the parent, this activity was digitally video recorded for coding purposes. When each dyad was able to complete their drawing the final product (quality of drawing) was also captured on camera. The observation lasted for about 3-8 minutes on average but if after 12 minutes the picture was still not completed, the session was stopped. To control for order effects the order in which each dyad (mother-child and father-child) carried out

the task was balanced across sessions. In addition, two different house templates (see Appendix 20) were used and balanced across dyads.

Following training on the coding of the videos with Professor Wolke, the researcher and her colleague collaborated to agree on the ‘best’ scores. For the purpose of inter-rater reliability the second coder was made blind to family type. Leisure vouchers were given as thank you gifts to each participating family.

6.3 Data analysis

Parallel analysis, often also commonly known as ‘merged’ analysis (Curry & Nunez-Smith, 2015) was implemented as part of the mixed-methods approach adopted in this study. The quantitative and qualitative datasets were analysed independently, findings from each dataset compared with each other and ultimately, conclusions, or ‘meta-inferences’ were made that incorporated comparison of findings from both data sets. This analytic strategy was appropriate in light of the slightly different research questions answered by the quantitative and qualitative data with an ultimate aim of answering the over-arching mixed methods research question: how do parents of adolescent only-children parent their singleton and is there an association between parenting and adolescent wellbeing in one-child families?

6.3.1 Survey data

Using SPSS (version 22.0), statistical analyses were performed on the data collected using the online questionnaires. Descriptive statistics provided an overview of the demographic information of the sample (parents and adolescents) in both family types. Exploratory factor analysis using the Maximum Likelihood method and Varimax rotation was conducted on the parenting variables across the three groups of participants. This analysis helped to reduce the parenting variables into a smaller set of variables (also known as factors) that shared a common variance (Bartholomew, Knott, & Moustaki, 2011). For all three groups of participants the parenting variables were reduced to two common factors: positive parenting and negative parenting.

Pearson’s correlation coefficient was used to identify any significant associations between continuous demographic variables and parenting (positive

and negative) as well as to assess the relationships between demographic characteristics, patterns of parenting and the adolescent psychological well-being variables. T-tests and one-way ANOVAs were used to compare parenting (positive and negative) and adolescent well-being on categorical demographic variables (including family type: SCF vs. NSCF). Simple linear regression based on models that included demographic variables was conducted to identify the best predictors of positive and negative parenting, and, of adolescent well-being.

6.3.2 Observation data

Descriptive statistics reported the sample demographics. Chi-square tests and t-tests were performed to determine if there was any significant relationship between family type (SCF & NSCF) and the other demographic variables. To test whether parent-adolescent interaction differed between SCF and NSCF Mann-Whitney U tests were performed on the parent scales (mothers and fathers separately), child scales (mother-adolescent dyads separately from father-adolescent dyads) and parent-adolescent interaction scales (mother-adolescent dyads separately from father-adolescent dyads). This non-parametric test was chosen with respect to the rather small sample sizes.

6.3.2.1 Inter-rater reliability

Inter-rater reliability estimates (IRR) using Cohen's (1968) weighted Kappa for all paired 20 variables was calculated for the two coders (25% of the total sample; 6 SCF – 4 mothers and 2 fathers; 6 NSCF – 4 fathers and 2 mothers). Weighted Kappa was chosen over simple Kappa as the former is more sensitive to the consideration of the 'relative seriousness' of any potential disagreements between the two coders (Fleiss, Cohen, & Everitt, 1969, p. 323). Bearing in mind that Cohen's weighted Kappa is typically used with categorical data (Fleiss, Cohen, & Everitt, 1969) and the Kappa statistics is characterised by an ordinal structure (Hallgren, 2012), the range of scores for each variable was considered when computing this statistics on SPSS. According to Hallgren, this is a noteworthy consideration as "a subject being rated as high by one coder and low by another should result in a lower IRR estimate than when a subject is rated as high by one coder and medium by another" (2012, p. 7). Regarding the general interpretation of the Kappa estimates, values ranging from 0.0 to 0.2 reflect slight

agreement, 0.21 to 0.40 reflect fair agreement, 0.41 to 0.60 reflect moderate agreement, 0.61 to 0.80 reflect substantial agreement, and finally, 0.81 to 1.0 are indicative of close to if not even perfect agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977, as cited in Hallgren, 2012).

IRR estimates using Cohen's weighted Kappa for the 20 coder pairs are presented in table 5 below. Values ranged from .02 to 1 (perfect agreement). Since Cohen's weighted Kappa for verbal control (parent scale) is markedly low (.02), this variable was excluded from further statistical analysis.

Table 5

IRR estimates using Cohen's weighted Kappa for the 20 coder pairs (N = 12; 6 SCF and 6 NSCF)

Variable	Cohen's Weighted Kappa estimate
PARENT	
Quality of drawing	.571
Verbal control	.017
Non-verbal control	1.00
Criticism	1.00
Sensitivity	.434
Rough physical handling	1.00
Dissatisfaction	.320
Satisfaction	.518
Emotional condition	.712
Vocalisation	.226
CHILD	
Dissatisfaction	.333
Satisfaction	.625
Emotional condition	.857
Criticism	1.00
Persistence/Attention	.514
Level of activity	.300
Readiness for social interaction	.381

Vocalisation	.284
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PARENT-ADOLESCENT

INTERACTION

Harmony	.697
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Control	.645
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6.3.3 Interview data

McLeod (2011, as cited by Fletcher, 2014) refers to the personal nature of qualitative research. Being myself a singleton hoping to delve deeper into the unique experience of only children, the above statement also holds true in my case hence the inclusion of a qualitative approach in the present study. By incorporating a qualitative approach in the current study, it also provided the researcher with the opportunity to explore the participants' perspectives, by adopting an 'insider's perspective', where the adolescent and the parents would be viewed as being the *experts* in parenting and being parented (Berg, 1998).

6.3.3.1 Data transcription

In line with Braun and Clarke (2012), all the interview data was audio-recorded and transcribed orthographically with an emphasis on reproducing (as far as possible) all the words, sounds (including those underlying some form of emotion), hesitations, and also, pauses for both the participant/s and the interviewer. In order to limit the issue of missing data and with an aim to preserve the quality and authenticity of the data, the whole interview was transcribed across all participants with only a few exceptions pertaining to specific instances when an interview was interrupted by a short break or an outsider (another family member who was not part of the interview). Data transcription was undertaken by the researcher as well as several research assistants (undergraduate students at Warwick University). One-on-one meetings were held with each research assistant to train them on data transcription and additional guidance notes along with clear ethical guidelines in terms of data protection were also provided (see Appendix 21). Following training each research assistant produced half a page of transcribed data which had to be

validated by the researcher before they could proceed. No identifiable information was used in all the transcripts.

6.3.3.2 Interpretative Thematic Analysis

Once the data transcription process was completed (roughly over four months) all transcribed data was electronically transferred to NVivo software (version 11.0) where it was then coded and analysed using Interpretative Thematic Analysis. Thematic analysis is tailored to make sense of transcribed interviews by transforming notes (the participants' responses) into themes which will be closely identified, described, analysed and reported within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The main purpose of this analysis is that it allows the representation of the participant's own perspective through his or her account of experiences, beliefs and perceptions (Park, Butcher, & Mass, 2004). This type of analysis was chosen as being best suited for the current study as the research questions were not theoretically bounded hence the researcher was mainly motivated to "tell an interpretative story about the data" (Clarke & Braun, 2014, p.1) that helps to answer the questions by providing an insight into parenting in single-child families including the influence of moderating factors such as child and parent gender in comparison to parenting in multiple children families. A few parenting studies have used thematic analysis with an aim to provide a detailed overview of the parenting experience within a very specific context such as from a Jordanian perspective (Oweis et al., 2012) or in relation to a specific issue such as prematurity (Whittingham, Boyd, Sanders, & Colditz, 2014). Nonetheless there is a place for more parenting research to employ thematic analysis as a tool to better understand the complexity of parenting in under-researched contexts.

This study followed the six-phase approach to thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) as follows: 1) *Familiarisation with the data* (achieved by listening to the audio version as well as reading and re-reading each transcript several times while making quick notes that helped the researcher to 'connect' with the data); 2) *Generating initial codes* (initial codes were used as labels to identify and capture anything interesting and meaningful in the data on a semantic level. At this stage an open coding approach was used throughout the dataset to preserve the richness of the data); 3) *Searching for themes* (using a broader

analytical perspective on the list of initial codes, the researcher immersed herself into an active process ‘searching’/identifying themes across the initially coded data by clustering these together into more complex and well-defined themes.

These were identified based on their importance and relevance to the research questions with an aim to contribute towards a coherent analytic story); 4)

Reviewing potential themes (all identified themes were reviewed in relation to the coded data as well as the complete dataset to ensure that they were coherent and distinct; that is, each theme had the potential to stand independently telling its ‘own story’ and also contribute as an important ‘piece’ to the whole analytic story.

A list of themes was compiled at this stage together with thematic maps for adolescents and parents in both family types (please see results section); 5)

Defining and naming themes (each theme was defined independently as well as in relation to all other themes in an attempt to construct a rich interpretive story based on the participants’ lived experiences. Data extracts were also collated to support each theme in the write-up phase); 6) *Producing the report* (in this final write up stage all the themes were organised and presented with the support of quotes to validate the researcher’s interpretations of the findings altogether providing a rich interpretive story on parenting in single-child families and the experience of the adolescent singletons in comparison to their peers). Stages 3, 4, 5 and 6 were performed in collaboration with the researcher’s supervisor.

In terms of the nature of the thematic analysis conducted in this study, semantic themes rather than latent themes were identified. That is, all themes were identified “within the explicit or surface meanings of the data” with an aim to only *describe* and *summarise* the data with no attempt to delve beyond what the participant has said “to theorise the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications” (Patton, 1990 as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 13). The researcher made the decision to approach thematic analysis at a semantic and explicit level to provide a first detailed descriptive insight into the parenting and lived experience of the one-child families living in UK. In addition, an inductive rather than theoretical thematic analysis was conducted whereby the data was coded using an open coding approach, hence not analyst-driven, with no influence of any pre-existing coding frame or the researcher’s own pre-conceived

ideas about parenting in single-child families either based on past literature or hearsay (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The next two chapters provide a detailed overview of the results of the current study based on its mixed-methods approach. Quantitative findings are presented first (chapter 7) followed by the qualitative findings (chapter 8).

CHAPTER VII: SURVEY AND OBSERVATION FINDINGS

This chapter first reports the statistical findings from the survey data from the two types of families (SCF: one-child and NSCF: multiple children). The statistical comparisons of the observation data on parent-adolescent interactions in both family types are then reported.

7.1 Survey data analysis

The main objectives of the survey data analysis were to: 1) compare parenting between family types (families with an only child or multiple children); 2) assess the relationships between patterns of parenting and psychological well-being of the adolescent and; 3) investigate any differences in parenting and adolescent wellbeing due to demographic characteristics.

Several statistical methods were used; 1) factor analysis (to reduce the multiple parenting variables across questionnaires into those with a similar trend of responses for a better conceptual understanding of the parenting dimensions); 2) Pearson's correlations (to explore associations between parenting and continuous demographic variables and also, between parenting and continuous adolescent well-being variables); 3) t-tests and one-way ANOVA (to identify whether SCF differ from NSCF and also, whether there are any differences pertaining to other demographic variables in relation to parenting and adolescent wellbeing, and also; 4) linear regression (to identify significant predictors of parenting and wellbeing). The above parametric statistical tests were chosen following checks on all dependent variables to investigate whether the data was normally distributed (Shapiro-Wilk test). Given that some variables followed a normal distribution and others did not, data transformation was considered. However, this option was not implemented for a number of reasons (Field, 2013): 1) the same transformation had to be successfully applied to all variables which was not feasible; 2) applying the 'wrong' transformation could have a more negative impact on data interpretation than working with the untransformed data; 3) data transformation could have implications for data interpretation by addressing constructs different to what were measured originally; 4) F-test (ANOVA) is still robust when working with skewed distributions; 5) last but not

least, it is always difficult to determine normality in small sample sizes. All survey data was analysed using PASW Statistics 22 (IBM Corp, 2013).

7.1.1 PARENTING

7.1.1.1 Factor analysis

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed on all parenting subscales. Parenting subscales entered in the EFA based on parents' self-reports were the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ) – authoritarian, authoritative and permissive; the Parents of Adolescents Separation Anxiety Scale (PASAS) – anxiety and comfort; and the Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS-PC) – non-violent discipline and psychological aggression. Parenting subscales entered in the EFA based on adolescents' reports were the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) - authoritarian, authoritative and permissive and, The Child-Parent Relationship Test (ChiP-C) – cohesion, identification, autonomy, conflict, rejection/indifference and overprotection. The objective of undertaking the EFA in this study was mainly to “explain a larger set of j measured variables with a smaller set of k latent constructs” (Henson & Roberts, 2006, p.394); therefore in this case reducing the number of parenting variables to a smaller set of latent variables while also retaining high reliability. This data reduction is based on common underlying factors. The sample size (with at least one fully completed survey from a participant) across all three groups including both family types was quite small (123 mothers, 56 fathers and 77 adolescents). However, EFA has been recognised as having no adequate sample size for its use (MacCallum et al., 1999; Costello & Osborne, 2005). A few studies have successfully used EFA using samples ranging from 10 to 50 participants (e.g.s. Geweke & Singleton, 1980; Bearden, Sharma, & Teel, 1982).

There are two types of rotation methods in EFA: orthogonal and oblique. There is some debate around the adequate use of each one based on their statistical properties (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). In order to address this issue, both rotation methods were used on the data to assess convergence: Varimax (orthogonal) and Oblimin (oblique). It was concluded that both rotation methods produced the same factor structure with the same data for mothers,

fathers and adolescents. Maximum likelihood was chosen as the factor extraction method and Varimax with Kaiser normalisation was selected as the rotation method. These methods were chosen as factor loadings clustered better around more distinct factors contributing to a simple factor structure than other extraction and rotation methods. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) was also considered (values close to 1 suggest that factor analysis is useful) along with a minimum value of 0.5 recommended for a satisfactory factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). Bartlett's test of sphericity was also taken into account (should be significant at $< .05$). Attention was given to the eigen-values and the scree plot to comprehend the number of factors produced.

Parental reports

Mothers

EFA was run on seven parenting variables and this yielded two factors (eigenvalues > 1 ; combined explained variance = 52.47 % of the variance). Variables which had the highest loadings (> 0.4) on each factor were retained, which meant two variables being eliminated: non-violent discipline and psychological aggression (Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scale). High factor scores indicate a higher level of negative parenting (factor 1: *PASAS - Anxiety*, *PSDQ - Authoritarian* and *PSDQ - Permissive*) and positive parenting (factor 2: *PASAS - Comfort* and *PSDQ - Authoritative*). Guided by Kahn (2006), these two factors were retained in accordance with the established parenting theory of positive and negative parenting as two distinct types of parenting and two ends of a continuum.

The suitability of factor analysis was confirmed based on the KMO value of 0.64 and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2 [21] = 213.15$, $p < .001$).

Table 6

Factor loadings based on Maximum Likelihood analysis with Varimax rotation for five parenting subscales (from mothers)

Subscales	Negative Parenting	Positive Parenting
PASAS (Anxiety)	.765	-
PASAS (Comfort)	-	.734
PSDQ (Authoritative)	-	.355
PSDQ (Authoritarian)	.688	-
PSDQ (Permissive)	.630	-

Note. Factor loadings < .4 are suppressed except for PSDQ – authoritative parenting which produced the highest factor loading on the second factor. Previous work recommends that only factor loadings as small as .32 should be ignored (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006; Field, 2013).

Fathers

EFA was run on the same seven parenting variables from fathers' self-reports and also resulted in two factors (eigenvalues >1; combined explained variance = 46.19 % of the variance). These two factors were again identified as negative parenting (factor 1: *PASAS - Anxiety*, *PSDQ - Authoritarian* and *PSDQ - Permissive*) and positive parenting (factor 2: *PASAS – Comfort* and *PSDQ - Authoritative*). The same two variables as for mothers were eliminated since these did not contribute to a simple factor structure. The suitability of factor analysis was confirmed based on the KMO value of 0.60 and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2 [21] = 123.72$, $p < .001$).

Table 7

Factor loadings based on Maximum Likelihood analysis with Varimax rotation for five parenting subscales (from fathers)

Subscales	Negative Parenting	Positive Parenting
PASAS (Anxiety)	.630	-
PASAS (Comfort)	-	.934
PSDQ (Authoritative)	-	.440
PSDQ (Authoritarian)	.752	-
PSDQ (Permissive)	.915	-

Note. Factor loadings < .4 are suppressed

Adolescents' reports

Mothers' parenting

EFA was undertaken on nine parenting variables from the adolescent's report resulting in two factors (eigenvalues >1; combined explained variance = 61.48 % of the variance). As for parents' self-reports, these were positive parenting (factor 1: PAQ – Authoritative, ChiP-C – Cohesion, ChiP-C – Identification and ChiP-C – Autonomy) and negative parenting (factor 2: PAQ – Authoritarian, ChiP-C – Conflict and ChiP-C – Overprotection). Two variables were again eliminated as these did not contribute to a simple factor structure (PAQ – Permissive and ChiP-C – Rejection/Indifference). The suitability of factor analysis was confirmed based on the KMO value of 0.74 and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2 [36] = 287.90, p < .001$).

Table 8

Factor loadings based on Maximum Likelihood analysis with Varimax rotation for seven parenting subscales (from adolescents on mothers' parenting)

Subscales	Positive Parenting	Negative Parenting
PAQ (Authoritarian)	-	.565
PAQ (Authoritative)	.645	-
ChiP-C (Cohesion)	.903	-
ChiP-C (Identification)	.775	-
ChiP-C (Autonomy)	.663	-
ChiP-C (Conflict)	-	.760
ChiP-C (Overprotection)	-	.546

Note. Factor loadings < .4 are suppressed

Fathers' parenting

EFA was undertaken on the same nine parenting variables from the adolescent's report on fathers' parenting also resulting in two factors (eigenvalues > 1; combined explained variance = 55.00 % of the variance). These two factors were again identified as positive parenting (factor 1: PAQ – Authoritative, ChiP-C – Cohesion, ChiP-C – Identification and ChiP-C – Autonomy) and negative parenting (factor 2: PAQ – Authoritarian, ChiP-C – Conflict, ChiP-C – Rejection/Indifference and ChiP-C – Overprotection). Only one variable was eliminated for not contributing to a simple factor structure (PAQ – Permissive). The suitability of factor analysis was confirmed based on the KMO reported value of 0.67 and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2 [36] = 314.08$, $p < .001$).

Table 9

Factor loadings based on Maximum Likelihood analysis with Varimax rotation for eight parenting subscales (from adolescents on fathers' parenting)

Subscales	Positive Parenting	Negative Parenting
PAQ (Authoritarian)	-	.480
PAQ (Authoritative)	.438	-
ChiP-C (Cohesion)	.937	-
ChiP-C (Identification)	.756	-
ChiP-C (Autonomy)	.791	-
ChiP-C (Conflict)	-	.754
ChiP-C (Rejection/Indifference)	-	.538
ChiP-C (Overprotection)	-	.526

Note. Factor loadings < .4 are suppressed

7.1.1.2 Relationship between positive and negative parenting and number of children

This analysis section aimed to compare parenting between families with an only child and those with multiple children. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the mean scores of two factors (positive and negative parenting) on family type (SCF/NSCF) across the three groups of participants (see table below). Levene's test was used to test for homogeneity of variance.

Table 10

Means, SD, t, df and p values for positive and negative parenting between SCF and NSCF families across mothers, fathers and adolescents

	Positive Parenting					Negative Parenting				
	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
SCF										
Mothers (n = 45)	.12	.91	1.03	109	.31	.14	1.04	1.40	74.7	.17
Fathers (n = 25)	.11	.97	.78	53	.44	.02	1.03	.11	53	.92
Ado_Mothers (n = 31)	-.03	1.11	-.22	53.5	.83	-.04	.74	-.38	69	.70
Ado_Fathers (n = 31)	-.11	.99	-.83	69	.41	.28	.89	2.52	69	.01
NSCF										
Mothers (n = 66)	-.04	.79	1.03	109	.31	-.11	.76	1.40	74.7	.17
Fathers (n = 30)	-.09	.97	.78	53	.44	-.01	.89	.11	53	.92
Ado_Mothers (n = 40)	.02	1.11	-.22	53.5	.83	.03	.93	-.38	69	.70
Ado_Fathers (n = 40)	.08	.94	-.83	69	.41	-.22	.78	2.52	69	.01

Family type (SCF vs. NSCF) did not have any significant effect on positive and negative parenting for both mothers and fathers. There was also no significant effect of family type (SCF vs. NSCF) on mothers' positive and negative parenting from adolescents' reports. However and in contrast to mothers' negative parenting, there was a significant effect of family type (SCF vs. NSCF) on fathers' negative parenting, $t(69) = 2.52, p < .05$, with adolescent only-children experiencing more negative parenting ($M = .28, SD = .89$) than adolescent non-only children ($M = -.22, SD = .78$).

7.1.1.3 Relationship between positive and negative parenting and other demographic characteristics

This analysis section aimed to examine whether there are any differences in parenting pertaining to other demographic variables.

Correlations

Pearson correlations were conducted to identify any significant associations between positive and negative parenting and demographic characteristics that were measured using continuous variables.

Mothers' self-reports

There was no significant relationship between positive parenting, mother's age and child's age ($p > .05$), as provided by mothers, or between negative parenting, mother's age and child's age ($p > .05$).

Fathers' self-reports

Similar to mothers, no significant correlations were found between positive parenting, father's age and child's age ($p > .05$), as provided by fathers, and the same for negative parenting, father's age and child's age ($p > .05$).

Adolescents' reports

Mothers' parenting

No significant correlations were found between positive parenting or negative parenting from mothers and child age ($p > .05$).

Fathers' parenting

Similar to mothers, no significant correlations were noted between positive parenting from fathers and child age ($p > .05$). However, a significant (but small to moderate in size) negative correlation was reported between negative parenting from fathers and child age ($r(75) = -.303, p < .05$), such that older adolescents were associated with slightly lower negative parenting from fathers.

T-tests

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the mean scores of two factors (positive and negative parenting) on child gender across the three groups of participants (see table below). Levene's test was used to test for homogeneity of variance.

Table 11

Means, SD, t, df and p values for positive and negative parenting between male and female adolescents across mothers, fathers and adolescents

	Positive Parenting					Negative Parenting				
	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Males										
Mothers (n = 55)	.02	.91	.02	109	.99	-.05	.95	-.44	109	.66
Fathers (n = 35)	-.05	.97	-.51	53	.61	.07	1.04	.70	53	.50
Ado_Mothers (n = 34)	-.36	.95	-3.25	69	.00	-.07	.83	-.65	69	.52
Ado_Fathers (n = 34)	-.14	1.00	-1.16	69	.25	.08	.91	.76	69	.45
Females										
Mothers (n = 56)	.02	.77	.02	109	.99	.03	.83	-.44	109	.66
Fathers (n = 20)	.09	.97	-.51	53	.61	-.12	.77	.70	53	.50
Ado_Mothers (n = 37)	.33	.84	-3.25	69	.00	.06	.88	-.65	69	.52
Ado_Fathers (n = 37)	.13	.92	-1.16	69	.25	-.08	.83	.76	69	.45

There was no significant effect of child gender on positive and negative parenting for both mothers and fathers. However, from adolescents' reports there was a significant effect of child gender on mothers' positive parenting, $t(69) = -3.25, p < .01$, with male adolescents experiencing less positive parenting ($M = -.36, SD = .95$) than female adolescents ($M = .33, SD = .84$). There was no significant effect of child gender on mothers' negative parenting. In contrast to the significant effect of child gender on mothers' positive parenting, no such effect was reported for fathers' positive as well as negative parenting amongst adolescents.

Effect of parent gender on positive and negative parenting

There was no significant effect of parent gender on positive and negative parenting as shown in table 12 below.

Table 12

Means, SD, t, df and p values for positive and negative parenting between fathers and mothers

	Fathers (n = 55)		Mothers (n = 114)		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Positive parenting	.01	.99	.00	.87	.04	167	.97
Negative parenting	.06	.95	.00	.91	.40	167	.69

One-way ANOVA

One-way ANOVAs were performed to compare the means scores of positive and negative parenting on dependent demographic variables with more than two levels (i.e. age, family structure, ethnicity and parents' educational qualification). See tables below. Post-hoc tests were used to locate any significant differences.

Table 13 Means, SD, F, and p values for positive and negative parenting between age groups across mothers, fathers and adolescents

	Positive Parenting				Negative Parenting			
	Mean	SD	F	p	Mean	SD	F	p
Parents' age								
<i>Mothers</i>								
< or = 21 (n = 1)	-.42	-	.82	.52	-.67	-	1.82	.13
22-34 (n = 11)	.10	1.28	.82	.52	.54	.90	1.82	.13
35-44 (n = 51)	-.02	.83	.82	.52	-.01	.94	1.82	.13
45-54 (n = 47)	.07	.75	.82	.52	-.15	.82	1.82	.13
55-64 (n = 4)	-.71	1.51	.82	.52	.56	1.23	1.82	.13
<i>Fathers</i>								
22-34 (n = 9)	-.48	1.08	1.00	.40	.08	.46	.63	.60
35-44 (n = 16)	.15	1.11	1.00	.40	.24	1.04	.63	.60
45-54 (n = 22)	.11	.80	1.00	.40	-.12	1.06	.63	.60
55-64 (n = 8)	-.07	.94	1.00	.40	-.23	.81	.63	.60

Adolescents' age

<i>Mothers' parenting</i>								
11 (n = 15)	.24	1.06	.41	.75	.23	.72	.86	.47
12 (n = 9)	-.05	1.12	.41	.75	-.31	.97	.86	.47
13 (n = 21)	-.11	1.13	.41	.75	-.09	.86	.86	.47
14 (n = 26)	-.03	.66	.41	.75	.05	.87	.86	.47
<i>Fathers' parenting</i>								
11 (n = 15)	.19	.88	.89	.47	.91	.24	2.68	.05
12 (n = 9)	-.19	.90	.89	.47	.10	1.18	2.68	.05
13 (n = 21)	-.22	1.27	.89	.47	-.18	.84	2.68	.05
14 (n = 26)	.14	.72	.89	.47	-.18	.63	2.68	.05

There was no significant difference in positive and negative parenting between age groups across mothers, fathers and adolescents.

Table 14 Means, SD, F, and p values for positive & negative parenting between family structures across mothers, fathers, adolescents

	Positive Parenting				Negative Parenting			
	Mean	SD	F	p	Mean	SD	F	p
Parents								
<i>Mothers</i>								
Two parents - Bio (n = 74)	-.02	.86	.66	.58	.10	.87	.98	.41
Two parents - Bio + Step (n = 14)	-.21	.86	.66	.58	-.25	1.00	.98	.41
Single-parent (n = 22)	.15	.99	.66	.58	-.09	1.04	.98	.41
Other (n = 4)	.30	.51	.66	.58	-.42	.44	.98	.41
<i>Fathers</i>								
Two parents - Bio (n = 38)	-.02	.86	1.25	.30	-.07	.87	1.95	.15
Two parents - Bio + Step (n = 8)	-.34	1.22	1.25	.30	-.26	.75	1.95	.15
Single-parent (n = 9)	.39	1.13	1.25	.30	.54	1.27	1.95	.15
Adolescents								
<i>Mothers' parenting</i>								
Two parents - Bio (n = 47)	.22	.93	.17	.92	-.17	.80	4.21	.01
Two parents - Bio + Step (n = 11)	-.51	.93	.17	.92	.77	.93	4.21	.01
Single-parent (n = 12)	-.31	1.09	.17	.92	-.04	.62	4.21	.01
Other (n = 1)	-1.22	-	.17	.92	.14	-	4.21	.01

Fathers' parenting

Two parents - Bio (n = 47)	.16	.87	3.16	.03	.00	.78	2.16	.10
Two parents - Bio + Step (n = 11)	.17	.73	3.16	.03	.47	1.03	2.16	.10
Single-parent (n = 12)	-.71	1.23	3.16	.03	-.40	.91	2.16	.10
Other (n = 1)	-.66	-	3.16	.03	-.49	-	2.16	.10

There was no significant difference in positive and negative parenting between family structures for both mothers and fathers. There was also no significant difference in mothers' positive parenting between family structures amongst adolescents. However, there was a significant difference in mothers' negative parenting between family structures amongst adolescents, $F(3, 67) = 4.21, p = .01$. Scheffe post-hoc test revealed that adolescents from families with one step-parent scored higher on negative parenting from mothers than those from intact families, $F(2, 67) = 6.30, p < .01$. Nonetheless the effect size was small (Cohen's $d = .16$). In sharp contrast to mothers' positive parenting, there was a significant difference in fathers' positive parenting between family structures amongst adolescents, $F(3, 67) = 3.16, p = .03$. Scheffe post-hoc test revealed that fathers from single-parent families scored higher on positive parenting than fathers from intact families with biological parents, $F(2, 67) = 4.48, p < .05$, although the effect size was small (Cohen's $d = .02$). However, there was no significant difference in fathers' negative parenting between family structures amongst adolescents.

Table 15 Means, SD, *F*, and *p* values for positive and negative parenting across educational qualifications for mothers and fathers

	Positive Parenting				Negative Parenting			
	Mean	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Mothers</i>								
Pre-university (n = 38)	.12	1.17	.74	.57	.45	.94	4.62	.00
Vocational (n = 16)	.12	.70	.74	.57	-.00	.73	4.62	.00
Undergraduate (n = 23)	-.20	.70	.74	.57	-.20	.69	4.62	.00
Postgraduate (n = 27)	-.12	.64	.74	.57	-.41	.84	4.62	.00
Other (n = 10)	.13	.66	.74	.57	-.15	1.07	4.62	.00
<i>Fathers</i>								
Pre-university (n = 25)	.30	.95	1.47	.23	-.04	.82	.23	.92
Vocational (n = 4)	-.35	.79	1.47	.23	.44	1.21	.23	.92
Undergraduate (n = 15)	-.06	.91	1.47	.23	-.01	1.00	.23	.92
Postgraduate (n = 10)	-.47	1.04	1.47	.23	-.03	1.19	.23	.92
Other (n = 1)	-.50	-	1.47	.23	-.25	-	.23	.92

In respect of educational qualification there was no significant difference in both mothers' and fathers' positive parenting. However, there was a significant difference in mothers' negative parenting based on educational qualification, $F(4, 109) = 4.62, p = .00$. Scheffe post-hoc test revealed that mothers with pre-university qualifications only (GCSE/A level) scored higher on negative parenting than mothers with postgraduate qualifications (Masters/Doctorate), $F(4, 109) = 4.62, p < .01$, although the effect size was small (Cohen's $d = .15$). In contrast to mothers, there was no significant difference in fathers' negative parenting based on educational qualification.

Table 16 Means, SD, F, and p values for positive and negative parenting between ethnic groups across mothers, fathers, adolescents

	Positive Parenting				Negative Parenting			
	Mean	SD	F	p	Mean	SD	F	p
<i>Mothers</i>								
White (n = 104)	.04	.85	2.67	.05	.00	.89	1.45	.23
Black (n = 2)	-1.62	1.30	2.67	.05	1.18	1.11	1.45	.23
Asian (n = 6)	-.25	.85	2.67	.05	-.30	1.22	1.45	.23
Other (n = 2)	.10	.74	2.67	.05	-.36	.45	1.45	.23
<i>Fathers</i>								
White (n = 51)	-.07	.97	3.81	.06	.02	.97	.48	.49
Asian (n = 4)	.88	.26	3.81	.06	-.31	.41	.48	.49
Adolescents								
<i>Mothers' parenting</i>								
White (n = 57)	.13	.87	3.05	.03	.03	.69	.20	.90
Black (n = 2)	-1.55	1.06	3.05	.03	-.32	3.24	.20	.90
Asian (n = 5)	-.12	1.03	3.05	.03	-.05	1.07	.20	.90
Other (n = 7)	-.15	1.16	3.05	.03	-.15	1.16	.20	.90
<i>Fathers' parenting</i>								
White (n = 57)	.14	.91	2.83	.05	.02	.85	.74	.54

Black (n = 2)	-1.21	1.03	2.83	.05	-1.82	.74	.74	.54
Asian (n = 5)	-.24	.15	2.83	.05	.21	1.15	.74	.54
Other (n = 7)	-.65	1.26	2.83	.05	-.09	.84	.74	.54

No significant difference in positive and negative parenting was found across ethnic backgrounds for both mothers and fathers. However, there was a significant difference in mothers' positive parenting between ethnic groups for adolescents, $F(3, 67) = 3.05, p = .03$. Nonetheless, Scheffe post-hoc test was not able to identify where this difference lay ($p > .05$). There was no significant difference in negative parenting from mothers between ethnic groups as rated by adolescents. In contrast to a significant difference in mothers' positive parenting based on ethnicity, there was no significant difference in fathers' positive as well as negative parenting between ethnic groups amongst adolescents.

7.1.1.4 Relationship between adolescent well-being and number of children

This section aimed to compare adolescent wellbeing (SDQ total difficulties, SDQ impact score, social acceptance, close friendships, life satisfaction and self-compassion) between families with an only child and those with multiple children. Exploratory Factor Analysis was undertaken on adolescent wellbeing variables but no common factor across these variables was identified. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the mean scores of child wellbeing measures on family type (SCF/NSCF) across the three groups of participants. Levene's test was used to test for homogeneity of variance.

Table 17

Means, SD, t, df and p values for SDQ Total difficulties score between SCF and NSCF families across mothers, fathers and adolescents

	SDQ Total Difficulties				
	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
SCF					
Mothers (n = 45)	11.24	5.90	.46	109	.65
Fathers (n = 25)	11.08	6.89	.59	53	.56
Adolescents (n = 31)	11.84	5.94	-.97	74	.33
NSCF					
Mothers (n = 66)	10.68	6.67	.46	109	.65
Fathers (n = 30)	10.03	6.24	.59	53	.56
Adolescents (n = 45)	13.24	6.35	-.97	74	.33

There was no significant effect of family type (SCF vs. NSCF) on SDQ Total difficulties score based on parental reports and adolescent self-reports.

Table 18

Means, SD, t, df and p values for SDQ Impact score between SCF and NSCF families across mothers, fathers and adolescents

	SDQ Impact score				
	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
SCF					
Mothers (n = 22)	2.09	2.31	.64	57	.52
Fathers (n = 11)	.55	1.23	-1.43	22	.17
Adolescents (n = 11)	.64	1.03	-1.21	38	.23
NSCF					
Mothers (n = 37)	1.70	2.21	.64	57	.52
Fathers (n = 13)	1.85	2.76	-1.43	22	.17
Adolescents (n = 29)	1.28	1.62	-1.21	38	.23

There was also no significant effect of family type (SCF vs. NSCF) on SDQ Impact score based on parental reports and adolescent self-reports.

Adolescents' self-reports

There was no significant effect of family type (SCF vs. NSCF) on social acceptance and close friendships as shown below.

Table 19

Means, SD, t, df and p values for social acceptance and close friendships between SCF and NSCF families

	SCF (n = 31)		NSCF (n = 40)		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Social acceptance	12.58	2.29	12.03	3.08	.84	69	.40
Close friendships	13.03	3.10	13.18	4.21	-.16	69	.88

Last but not least, there was again no significant effect of family type (SCF vs. NSCF) on life satisfaction. See table below.

Table 20

Means, SD, t, df and p values for life satisfaction between SCF and NSCF families

	SCF (n = 31)		NSCF (n = 46)		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Life satisfaction	24.77	7.50	25.30	8.36	-.29	69.04	.77

Only one significant effect of family type (SCF vs. NSCF) on adolescent wellbeing was revealed and that was on self-compassion, $t(74) = 2.96$, $p < .01$, with adolescent only-children scoring higher ($M = 39.68$, $SD = 5.45$) than adolescent non-only children ($M = 35.13$, $SD = 7.24$) with a medium to large effect size (Cohen's $d = .70$). See table below.

Table 21

Means, SD, t, df and p values for self-compassion between SCF and NSCF families

	SCF (n = 31)		NSCF (n = 45)		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Self-compassion	39.68	5.45	35.13	7.24	2.96	74	.00

7.1.1.5 Relationship between adolescent well-being and other demographic characteristics

This section explored whether there are any significant associations between adolescent wellbeing and other demographic characteristics measured.

Correlations

Pearson correlations were computed to examine whether there is any significant associations between adolescent wellbeing and the continuous variable demographic characteristics.

Mothers' reports

No significant correlations were found between the two adolescent wellbeing variables measured (SDQ Total difficulties score and SDQ Impact score), mother's age and child's age ($p > .05$).

Fathers' reports

Likewise no significant correlations were found between the adolescent wellbeing SDQ measures, father's age and child's age ($p > .05$).

Adolescents' self-reports

No significant correlations were found between the adolescent wellbeing variables and child's age ($p > .05$).

T-tests

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the mean scores of child wellbeing measures on child gender across the three groups of participants. Levene's test was used to test for homogeneity of variance.

Table 22

Means, SD, t, df and p values for SDQ Total difficulties score between male and female adolescents across mothers, fathers and adolescents

	SDQ Total Difficulties				
	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Males					
Mothers (n = 55)	12.36	6.85	2.45	109	.02
Fathers (n = 25)	11.43	7.43	1.62	53	.11
Adolescents (n = 37)	14.76	6.08	3.01	74	.00
Females					
Mothers (n = 56)	9.48	5.50	2.45	109	.02
Fathers (n = 30)	8.90	4.12	1.62	53	.11
Adolescents (n = 39)	10.69	5.69	3.01	74	.00

Based on mothers' reports, there was a significant effect of child gender on SDQ Total difficulties score, $t(109) = 2.45, p < .05$, with male adolescents scoring higher ($M = 12.36, SD = 6.85$) than female adolescents ($M = 9.48, SD = 5.50$). In contrast to mothers, there was no significant effect of child gender on SDQ Total difficulties score based on fathers' reports. In line with mothers' reports, there was a significant effect of child gender on SDQ Total difficulties score based on adolescents' self-reports, $t(74) = 3.01, p < .01$, with male adolescents scoring higher ($M = 14.76, SD = 6.08$) than female adolescents ($M = 10.69, SD = 5.69$).

Table 23

Means, SD, t , df and p values for SDQ Impact score between male and female adolescents across mothers, fathers and adolescents

	SDQ Impact score				
	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Males					
Mothers (n = 35)	2.49	2.54	2.80	57	.01
Fathers (n = 17)	1.47	2.53	.73	22	.47
Adolescents (n = 20)	.85	1.46	-1.06	38	.30
Females					
Mothers (n = 24)	.92	1.25	2.80	57	.01
Fathers (n = 7)	.71	1.50	.73	22	.47
Adolescents (n = 20)	1.35	1.53	-1.06	38	.30

Based on mothers' reports, there was also a significant effect of child gender on SDQ Impact score, $t(57) = 2.80$, $p < .05$, with male adolescents scoring higher ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 2.54$) than female adolescents ($M = 0.92$, $SD = 1.25$). However, there was no significant effect of child gender on SDQ Impact score for both fathers and adolescents.

Adolescents' self-reports

Whilst there was no significant effect of child gender on close friendships, there was a significant effect of child gender on social acceptance, $t(69) = -2.51$, $p < .05$, with female adolescents scoring higher ($M = 13.03$, $SD = 2.74$) than male adolescents ($M = 11.44$, $SD = 2.57$).

Table 24

Means, SD, t, df and p values for social acceptance and close friendships between male and female adolescents

	Males (n = 34)		Females (n = 37)		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Social acceptance	11.44	2.57	13.03	2.74	-2.51	69	.02
Close friendships	12.65	3.36	13.54	4.07	-1.01	68.2	.32

There was no significant effect of child gender on life satisfaction as shown below.

Table 25

Means, SD, t, df and p values for life satisfaction between male and female adolescents

	Males (n = 37)		Females (n = 40)		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Life satisfaction	23.76	7.39	26.33	8.39	-1.42	75	.16

Likewise no significant effect of child gender on self-compassion was found as shown below.

Table 26

Means, SD, t, df and p values for self-compassion between male and female adolescents

	Males (n = 37)		Females (n = 39)		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Self – compassion	36.57	5.03	37.38	8.35	-.52	62.9	.61

One-way ANOVA

One-way ANOVA was used to compare the mean scores of child wellbeing measures on specific dependent demographic variables with more than two levels (family structure, ethnicity and parents' educational qualification). See tables below. Post-hoc tests were carried out to probe further into any significant differences. For fathers' reports, the effect of ethnicity on SDQ impact score was not explored due to lack of sufficient cases.

Table 27

Means, SD, F, and p values for SDQ Total Difficulties score between family structures across mothers, fathers and adolescents

	SDQ Total Difficulties			
	Mean	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Family structure				
<i>Mothers</i>				
2-parents (Bio) (n = 74)	10.3	5.40	1.51	.22
2-parents (Bio + Step) (n = 14)	12.93	8.78	1.51	.22
Single-parent (n = 22)	11.0	7.13	1.51	.22
Other (n = 4)	15.75	8.50	1.51	.22
<i>Fathers</i>				
2-parents (Bio) (n = 38)	10.5	7.00	.00	1.00
2-parents (Bio + Step) (n = 8)	10.4	5.42	.00	1.00
Single-parent (n = 9)	10.6	5.23	.00	1.00
<i>Adolescents</i>				
2-parents (Bio) (n = 51)	11.7	5.95	2.20	.10
2-parents (Bio + Step) (n = 12)	16.7	5.47	2.20	.10
Single-parent (n = 12)	12.8	6.94	2.20	.10
Other (n = 1)	13.0	-	2.20	.10

There was no significant effect of family structure on SDQ Total difficulties score based on mothers', fathers' as well as adolescents' self-reports.

Table 28

Means, SD, F, and p values for SDQ Impact score between family structures across mothers, fathers and adolescents

	SDQ Impact score			
	Mean	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Family structure				
<i>Mothers</i>				
2-parents (Bio) (n = 35)	1.40	1.65	2.33	.08
2-parents (Bio + Step) (n = 11)	2.82	3.22	2.33	.08
Single-parent (n = 12)	1.67	2.23	2.33	.08
Other (n = 3)	4.00	2.00	2.33	.08
<i>Fathers</i>				
2-parents (Bio) (n = 18)	1.28	2.50	.39	.68
2-parents (Bio + Step) (n = 3)	2.00	2.00	.39	.68
Single-parent (n = 3)	.33	.58	.39	.68
<i>Adolescents</i>				
2-parents (Bio) (n = 24)	.58	.94	3.75	.02
2-parents (Bio + Step) (n = 8)	2.25	2.05	3.75	.02
Single-parent (n = 7)	1.29	1.60	3.75	.02
Other (n = 1)	3.00	-	3.75	.02

There was no significant effect of family structure on SDQ Impact score based on both mothers' and fathers' reports. However, there was a significant difference in SDQ Impact score between family structures amongst adolescents, $F(3, 36) = 3.75, p = .02$. Scheffe post-hoc test revealed that adolescents from step-families scored higher on SDQ Impact score than adolescents from intact two-parent families with biological parents, $F(2, 36) = 4.62, p < .05$. Nonetheless it was a small effect size (Cohen's $d = .20$).

Table 29

Means, SD, F, and p values for SDQ Total Difficulties score between ethnic groups across mothers, fathers and adolescents

	SDQ Total Difficulties score			
	Mean	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Ethnicity				
<i>Mothers</i>				
White (n = 104)	10.9	6.55	.35	.79
Black (n = 2)	15.0	6.07	.35	.79
Asian (n = 6)	11.5	3.73	.35	.79
Other (n = 2)	9.00	2.83	.35	.79
<i>Fathers</i>				
White (n = 51)	10.96	6.45	3.55	.07
Asian (n = 4)	4.50	2.25	3.55	.07
<i>Adolescents</i>				
White (n = 60)	12.5	6.39	.28	.84
Black (n = 2)	16.5	9.19	.28	.84
Asian (n = 6)	13.2	5.60	.28	.84
Other (n = 8)	12.8	5.23	.28	.84

There was no significant effect of ethnicity on SDQ Total Difficulties score based on mothers' and fathers' reports as well as adolescent self-reports.

Table 30

Means, SD, F, and p values for SDQ Impact score between ethnic groups across mothers and adolescents

	SDQ Impact score			
	Mean	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Ethnicity				
<i>Mothers</i>				
White (n = 55)	1.85	2.22	.07	.93
Black (n = 1)	1.00	-	.07	.93
Asian (n = 5)	1.80	2.49	.07	.93
<i>Adolescents</i>				
White (n = 33)	1.12	1.52	.49	.69
Black (n = 2)	1.00	1.41	.49	.69
Asian (n = 2)	0.00	0.00	.49	.69
Other (n = 3)	1.67	2.08	.49	.69

There was no significant effect of ethnicity on SDQ Impact score based on mothers' reports as well as adolescent self-reports.

Table 31

Means, SD, F, and p values for SDQ Total Difficulties score across educational qualifications for mothers and fathers

	SDQ Total Difficulties score			
	Mean	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Educational qualification				
<i>Mothers</i>				
Pre-university (n = 38)	12.2	6.86	1.42	.23
Vocational (n = 16)	12.1	8.26	1.42	.23
Undergraduate (n = 23)	10.7	5.49	1.42	.23
Postgraduate (n = 27)	8.63	4.74	1.42	.23
Other (n = 10)	11.1	6.28	1.42	.23
<i>Fathers</i>				
Pre-university (n = 25)	9.56	5.70	.36	.84
Vocational (n = 4)	12.5	8.10	.36	.84
Undergraduate (n = 15)	10.5	5.99	.36	.84
Postgraduate (n = 10)	12.1	9.06	.36	.84
Other (n = 1)	11.0	-	.36	.84

There was no significant effect of educational qualification on SDQ Total Difficulties score for both mothers and fathers.

Table 32

Means, SD, F, and p values for SDQ Impact score across educational qualifications for mothers and fathers

	SDQ Impact score			
	Mean	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Educational qualification				
<i>Mothers</i>				
Pre-university (n = 19)	2.00	2.40	.41	.80
Vocational (n = 8)	2.63	3.20	.41	.80
Undergraduate (n = 15)	1.53	1.25	.41	.80
Postgraduate (n = 15)	1.53	2.39	.41	.80
Other (n = 4)	1.75	1.26	.41	.80
<i>Fathers</i>				
Pre-university (n = 7)	.29	.49	2.97	.05
Vocational (n = 4)	.75	1.50	2.97	.05
Undergraduate (n = 8)	1.00	1.51	2.97	.05
Postgraduate (n = 4)	4.25	4.03	2.97	.05
Other (n = 1)	0.00	-	2.97	.05

There was also no significant effect of educational qualification on SDQ Impact score for both mothers and fathers.

Adolescents' self-reports

There was no significant difference in both social acceptance and close friendships between family structures amongst adolescents. See table below.

Table 33

Means, SD, F, and p values for social acceptance and close friendships between family structures

	2 parents (Bio) (n = 47)		2 parents (Bio + Step) (n = 11)		Single- Parent (n = 12)		Other (n = 1)		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Social acceptance	12.5	2.26	12.0	3.35	12.3	3.77	7.00	-	1.33	.27
Close friendships	13.1	3.32	13.8	4.36	13.2	4.55	6.00	-	1.36	.26

Likewise, there was no significant difference in self-compassion between family structures amongst adolescents. See table below.

Table 34

Means, SD, F, and p values for self-compassion between family structures

	2 parents (Bio) (n = 51)		2 parents (Bio + Step) (n = 12)		Single- Parent (n = 12)		Other (n = 1)		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Self-compassion	37.4	7.22	35.8	5.84	37.3	6.50	27.0	-	.87	.46

There was no significant difference in life satisfaction between family structures amongst adolescents (see table below).

Table 35

Means, SD, F, and p values for life satisfaction between family structures

	2 parents (Bio) (n = 52)		2 parents (Bio + Step) (n = 12)		Single- Parent (n = 12)		Other (n = 1)		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Life satisfaction	26.0	7.99	26.3	6.21	20.0	8.41	23.0	-	2.06	.11

There was also no significant difference in life satisfaction between ethnic groups amongst adolescents (see table below).

Table 36

Means, SD, F, and p values for life satisfaction between ethnic groups

	White (n = 60)		Black (n = 2)		Asian (n = 6)		Other (n = 9)		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Life satisfaction	26.0	7.64	22.0	11.3	22.3	8.71	21.4	9.00	1.25	.30

Likewise there was no significant difference in self-compassion between ethnic groups amongst adolescents (see table below).

Table 37

Means, SD, F, and p values for self-compassion between ethnic groups

	White (n = 60)		Black (n = 2)		Asian (n = 6)		Other (n = 8)		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Self-compassion	36.9	6.94	41.5	2.12	39.2	4.96	35.0	8.47	.70	.55

There was also no significant difference in social acceptance and close friendships between ethnic groups amongst adolescents (see table below).

Table 38

Means, SD, F, and p values for social acceptance and close friendships between ethnic groups

	White (n = 58)		Black (n = 2)		Asian (n = 5)		Other (n = 6)		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Social acceptance	12.4	2.77	14.0	2.83	13.2	1.64	9.67	2.34	2.41	.08
Close friendships	13.4	3.73	11.5	4.95	13.4	3.21	10.8	4.02	.97	.41

7.1.1.6 Relationship between adolescent well-being and parenting

Correlations

Pearson correlations were conducted to identify any significant associations between adolescent wellbeing and positive and negative parenting.

Mothers' reports

SDQ Total difficulties score was positively correlated with negative parenting ($r(121) = .193, p < .05$) and negatively correlated with positive parenting ($r(121) = -.237, p < .05$), therefore problem levels increase as negative parenting increases and positive parenting decreases. Both correlations were small to moderate. No significant correlation was found between parenting (positive and negative) and SDQ Impact score ($p > .05$).

Fathers' reports

Negative parenting was significantly positively correlated with SDQ Total difficulties score ($r(54) = .676, p < .01$) as well as with SDQ Impact score ($r(54) = .648, p < .01$), so problem levels increase as negative parenting increases. These

were large correlations. No significant correlations were found between positive parenting and the two SDQ measures ($p > .05$).

Adolescents' reports

Mothers' parenting

Mothers' positive parenting was significantly positively correlated with adolescent life satisfaction ($r(75) = .536, p < .01$) and social acceptance ($r(75) = .311, p < .01$). Therefore life satisfaction and social acceptance amongst adolescents increase as positive parenting from mothers increases. These were moderate to large correlations. On the other hand, mothers' negative parenting was significantly negatively correlated with adolescent close friendships ($r(75) = -.307, p < .01$). That is, close friendships amongst adolescents decrease as negative parenting from mothers increases. This was a moderate correlation. No significant correlations were reported between parenting (positive and negative) and other adolescent wellbeing scales ($p > .05$).

Fathers' parenting

Fathers' positive parenting was also significantly positively correlated with adolescent life satisfaction ($r(75) = .288, p < .05$) and also, adolescent close friendships ($r(75) = .285, p < .05$). That is, life satisfaction and close friendships amongst adolescents increase as positive parenting from fathers increases. Both correlations were small to moderate. Fathers' negative parenting was only significantly positively correlated with adolescent SDQ Total difficulties score ($r(75) = .316, p < .01$) suggesting that problem levels increase as negative parenting from fathers increases (a moderate correlation), with no significant correlations identified with the other adolescent wellbeing measures ($p > .05$).

7.1.1.7 Linear Regression

7.1.1.7.1 What are the predictors of parenting?

A simple linear regression model was created to establish whether family type (SCF vs. NSCF) is a significant predictor of parenting. Other demographic variables which were found to have a significant effect on parenting (positive and/or negative) were also included in the regression model. Although parent's

age did not have a significant effect on parenting it was still included in the model. It has been debated as to whether significant effects are the only criteria to use when constructing regression models. Attention is drawn to the importance of controlling for all other variables (especially demographic variables) when conducting regression analysis. Many researchers are sceptical of oversimplified models and advocate for more control of variables as best practice regardless of significance (Sweet & Grace-Martin, 2012). The model comprised the following variables: family type, parent's age, child's age, child's gender, family structure, ethnicity and parent's educational qualification. Dummy variables for categorical variables were also created and included in the model as predictors, e.g. for ethnicity, it was recoded such that White/Caucasian was used as the comparison category for the other ethnic groups (Asian, Black and Other). Similarly, family structure was recoded with two-parents as the comparison category for the other family structures (Single-Parent and Other). Taking into account that normal assumptions and homoscedasticity were not met, the analysis was undertaken with the application of a robust method commonly known as *bootstrapping*. This statistic ensures reliability even when normality assumptions, homoscedasticity and also, linearity and additivity are violated (Field, 2016). With bootstrapping the confidence intervals are for the unstandardized beta and CIs are based on a 1000 bootstrap samples.

Positive parenting

Mothers' self-reports

With maternal positive parenting as the dependent variable, the regression model was not significant ($F(7,103) = .919, p = .50$), with an R^2 of .059. As shown in the table below, family type was not a significant predictor of maternal positive parenting, and nor were any of the demographic variables.

Table 39

Linear Regression predicting positive parenting (N = 111)

Variable	Unstandardised Beta	S.E	B	<i>t</i>	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Constant	-.185	.596		-.311	-1.67	1.22
Age	-.006	.118	-.005	-.050	-.262	.255
FAMILY TYPE	-.172	.167	-.101	-1.03	-.491	.176
Child age	.128	.079	.160	1.62	-.023	.277
Child gender	.093	.172	.056	.543	-.268	.484
Family structure	-.246	.206	-.123	-1.20	-.683	.192
Ethnicity	.168	.323	.052	.521	-.434	.705
Educational qualification	-.030	.046	-.064	-.638	-.133	.070

* $p < .05$

Fathers' self-reports

With paternal positive parenting as the dependent variable, the regression model was not significant ($F(7,47) = 1.74, p = .12$), with an R^2 of .205. As shown in the table below, family type was not a significant predictor either of paternal positive parenting, and nor were any of the demographic variables.

Table 40

Linear Regression predicting positive parenting (N = 55)

Variable	Unstandardised Beta	S.E	B	<i>t</i>	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Constant	1.52	.850		1.79	-.362	3.42
Age	.162	.148	.158	1.10	-.130	.459
FAMILY TYPE	-.329	.260	-.171	-1.26	-.826	.165
Child age	-.093	.123	-.107	-.757	-.328	.172
Child gender	.079	.284	.040	.278	-.442	.672
Family structure	-.306	.347	-.118	-.881	-.983	.606
Ethnicity	-1.00	.485	-.272	-2.07	-1.81	-.141
Educational qualification	-.143	.076	-.254	-1.88	-.298	.031

* $p < .05$

Adolescents' reports

Mothers' parenting

With perceived positive parenting from mothers as the dependent variable, the regression model fitted significantly ($F(5,65) = 3.58, p < .01$), with an R^2 of .216. Family type was not a significant predictor of positive parenting from mothers (see table below), however two demographic variables were: ethnicity ($\beta = .261, t = 2.38, p < .05$) such that the white/Caucasian ethnic background was predictive of more positive parenting than other ethnic groups, and child gender ($\beta = .364, t = 3.28, p < .01$) such that being female was predictive of more positive parenting from mothers than being male. The best predictor of positive parenting was child gender.

Table 41

Linear Regression predicting positive parenting (N = 71)

Variable	Unstandardised Beta	S.E	B	T	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Constant	-1.20	.530		-2.26	-2.25	.046
Age	-.101	.100	-.121	-1.00	-.289	.082
Gender	.689	.210	.364	3.28**	.271	1.08
Family structure	-.123	.277	-.050	-.445	-.628	.312
FAMILY TYPE	.056	.227	.029	.246	-.417	.566
Ethnicity	.622	.262	.261	2.38*	.049	1.19

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Fathers' parenting

With perceived positive parenting from fathers as the dependent variable, the regression model also fitted significantly ($F(5,65) = 3.83, p < .01$), with an R^2 of .228. Family type was again not a significant predictor of positive parenting from fathers (see table below). However, two demographic variables were, and explained 22.8% of the variance in scores; ethnicity ($\beta = .288, t = 2.64, p < .05$) such that the white/Caucasian ethnic background was predictive of more positive parenting from fathers than other ethnic groups, and family structure ($\beta = .343, t = 3.06, p < .01$) such that intact families was predictive of more positive parenting from fathers than other family structures. The best predictor was family structure.

Table 42

Linear Regression predicting positive parenting (N = 71)

Variable	Unstandardised	S.E	B	T	95% Confidence	
	Beta				Lower	Upper
Constant	-1.73	.531		-3.27	-2.83	-.543
Age	.042	.100	.050	.417	-.143	.243
Gender	.196	.210	.103	.934	-.209	.623
Family structure	.848	.277	.343	3.06**	.173	1.52
FAMILY TYPE	.121	.227	.063	.533	-.369	.575
Ethnicity	.692	.262	.288	2.64*	.177	1.21

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Negative parenting

Mothers' self-reports

With maternal negative parenting as the dependent variable, the regression equation was not significant ($F(7,103) = 1.90, p = .08$), with an R^2 of .114. Family type was not a significant predictor of negative parenting from mothers, and nor were any of the demographic variables (see table below).

Table 43

Linear Regression predicting negative parenting (N = 111)

Variable	Unstandardised	S.E	B	T	95% Confidence	
	Beta				Lower	Upper
Constant	1.02	.610		1.67	-.234	2.27
Age	-.158	.120	-.131	-1.31	-.404	.076
Family Type	-.207	.171	-.115	-1.21	-.576	.131
Child age	.016	.081	.019	.193	-.130	.177
Child gender	-.022	.176	-.012	-.124	-.362	.338
Family structure	.253	.210	.120	1.20	-.185	.714
Ethnicity	.022	.331	.006	.066	-.691	.868
Educational qualification	-.132	.048	-.272	-2.77	-.228	-.016

* $p < .05$

Fathers' self-reports

With paternal negative parenting as the dependent variable, the regression equation was not significant ($F(7,47) = 1.13, p = .36$), with an R^2 of .144. As shown in the table below, family type was not a significant predictor of paternal negative parenting, and nor were any of the demographic variables.

Table 44

Linear Regression predicting negative parenting (N = 55)

Variable	Unstandardised Beta	S.E	B	T	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Constant	1.15	.862		1.33	-.067	2.40
Age	-.066	.151	-.066	-.441	-.377	.233
Family Type	.077	.264	.041	.291	-.404	.622
Child age	-.191	.125	-.225	-1.53	-.439	.035
Child gender	-.196	.289	-.101	-.677	-.833	.299
Family structure	-.633	.352	-.250	-1.80	-1.61	.143
Ethnicity	.441	.492	.122	.896	-.140	1.14
Educational qualification	-.011	.077	-.020	-.143	-.142	.140

* $p < .05$

Adolescents' reports

Mothers' parenting

With perceived negative parenting from mothers as the dependent variable, the regression equation was not significant ($F(5,65) = .230, p = .95$), with an R^2 of .017. Similar to parents' self-reports, family type was not a significant predictor of negative parenting from mothers, and nor were any of the demographic variables. See table below.

Table 45

Linear Regression predicting negative parenting (N = 71)

Variable	Unstandardised	S.E	B	<i>t</i>	95% Confidence	
	Beta				Lower	Upper
Constant	-.233	.529		-.44	-1.33	.908
Age	-.047	.100	-.064	-.473	-.205	.144
Gender	.122	.210	.072	.580	-.253	.508
Family structure	-.013	.276	-.006	-.046	-.433	.389
Family type	.103	.226	.061	.456	-.291	.474
Ethnicity	.165	.261	.078	.633	-.643	.933

* $p < .05$

Fathers' parenting

With perceived negative parenting from fathers as the dependent variable, the regression equation was also not significant ($F(5,65) = 2.69, p < .05$), with an R^2 of .172. Again, family type was not revealed as a significant predictor of negative parenting from fathers, and nor were any of the demographic variables. See table below.

Table 46

Linear Regression predicting negative parenting (N = 71)

Variable	Unstandardised Beta	S.E	B	<i>t</i>	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Constant	.356	.494		.722	.722	.473
Age	-.134	.093	-.179	-1.44	-1.44	.155
Gender	-.117	.196	-.068	-.599	-.599	.551
Family structure	.438	.258	.197	1.70	1.70	.094
Family type	-.386	.212	-.223	-1.82	-1.82	.073
Ethnicity	.075	.244	.035	.307	.307	.760

* $p < .05$

7.1.1.7.2 What are the predictors of adolescent wellbeing?

Another set of simple linear regression model was created to examine whether family type (SCF vs. NSCF) and parenting (positive and negative) are significant predictors of adolescent wellbeing. Other demographic variables which were found to influence adolescent wellbeing were also included in the regression model. In line with Sweet and Grace-Martin (2012) and in an attempt to control for all demographic variables including those with non-significant effects, age, ethnicity and educational qualification were also considered in the model. The model included the following variables: parent's age, child's age, child's gender, family type, family structure, ethnicity, parents' educational qualification, positive parenting and negative parenting. If more than one predictor was revealed the best predictor was again identified. The same dummy variables created for categorical variables for previous regression analysis were included in the model as predictors. Bootstrapping was again used as a robust method that is still reliable when normal assumptions and any other assumptions for linear regression are not met. SDQ Impact score was not included in regression analyses given a limited number of cases across groups and little variance.

Mothers' reports

With SDQ Total difficulties score as the dependent variable, the regression equation was not significant ($F(9,101) = 1.93, p = .06$), with an R^2 of .147. Family type was not a significant predictor of SDQ Total difficulties score, and nor were any of the other variables (see table below).

Table 47

Linear Regression predicting SDQ Total difficulties score (N = 111)

Variable	Unstandardised	S.E	B	<i>t</i>	95% Confidence	
	Beta				Lower	Upper
Constant	17.35	4.38		3.96	9.03	25.5
Age	-.043	.860	-.005	-.050	-1.95	1.75
FAMILY TYPE	.019	1.23	.001	.015	-2.16	2.59
Child age	-.037	.582	-.006	-.064	-1.14	1.07
Child gender	-3.02	1.25	-.239	-2.42	-5.66	-.454
Family structure	-.281	1.51	-.019	-.186	-4.20	3.53
Ethnicity	.506	2.35	.021	.216	-2.27	3.92
Educational qualification	-.410	.350	-.118	-1.17	-1.08	.228
NEGATIVE PARENTING	1.22	.698	.171	1.75	-.333	2.83
POSITIVE PARENTING	-1.63	.715	-.216	-2.28	-3.47	.003

* $p < .05$

Fathers' reports

With SDQ Total difficulties score as the dependent variable, the regression model fitted significantly ($F(9,45) = 6.20, p < .001$), with an R^2 of .554. Family type was not a significant predictor of SDQ Total difficulties score (see table below), however negative parenting was ($\beta = .693, t = 6.44, p < .01$) such that more negative parenting was predictive of more difficulties and explained 55.4% of the variance in scores.

Table 48

Linear Regression predicting SDQ Total difficulties score (N = 55)

Variable	Unstandardised Beta	S.E	B	<i>t</i>	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Constant	4.79	4.62		1.04	-6.71	13.1
Age	-.062	.776	-.009	-.080	-1.63	1.65
FAMILY TYPE	-.383	1.37	-.030	-.280	-3.14	2.10
Child age	.060	.653	.010	.091	-1.13	1.38
Child gender	-1.95	1.48	-.146	-1.32	-4.82	.656
Family structure	3.18	1.87	.182	1.70	-.694	6.73
Ethnicity	4.95	2.63	.200	1.88	-1.75	11.9
Educational qualification	.342	.408	.090	.839	-.390	1.26
NEGATIVE PARENTING	4.78	.742	.693	6.44**	3.34	6.61
POSITIVE PARENTING	.552	.753	.082	.733	-1.11	2.42

** $p < .01$

Adolescents' self-reports

With SDQ Total difficulties score as the dependent variable, the regression model fitted significantly ($F(9,61) = 5.24, p < .001$), with an R^2 of .436. Two significant predictors of the dependent variable were identified, and explained 43.6% of the variance in scores; family type ($\beta = .230, t = 2.12, p < .05$) such that adolescent non-only children had more difficulties than adolescent only-children, and positive parenting from mothers ($\beta = -.464, t = -3.72, p < .01$) such that more positive parenting from mothers was predictive of less difficulties. The best predictor of SDQ Total difficulties score was positive parenting (see table below).

Table 49

Linear Regression predicting SDQ Total difficulties score (N = 71)

Variable	Unstandardised Beta	S.E	B	<i>t</i>	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Constant	15.24	3.29		4.63	7.90	21.7
Age	.023	.593	.004	.039	-1.21	1.44
Gender	-2.28	1.30	-.185	-1.76	-4.99	.973
Family structure	-1.04	1.75	-.065	-.596	-5.55	3.27
FAMILY TYPE	2.86	1.35	.230	2.12*	.277	5.47
Ethnicity	.228	1.60	.015	.143	-2.17	2.85
POSITIVE PARENTING_FATHER	.246	.777	.038	.316	-1.30	2.13
NEGATIVE PARENTING_FATHER	1.70	.889	.237	1.91	.135	3.42
POSITIVE PARENTING_MOTHER	-3.02	.812	-.464	-3.72**	-5.34	-1.18
NEGATIVE PARENTING_MOTHER	.951	.805	.130	1.18	-.717	2.79

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

With social acceptance as the dependent variable, the regression equation was not significant ($F(9,60) = 1.65, p = .12$), with an R^2 of .198, and there were no significant predictors (see table below).

Table 50

Linear Regression predicting social acceptance (N = 70)

Variable	Unstandardised Beta	S.E	β	<i>t</i>	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Constant	9.92	1.76		5.64	6.04	14.6
Age	.218	.315	.092	.692	-.405	.830
Gender	1.18	.689	.214	1.71	-.589	2.55
Family structure	.446	.929	.063	.480	-1.73	2.72
FAMILY TYPE	-.947	.721	-.172	-1.31	-2.20	.237
Ethnicity	.102	.896	.015	.114	-1.76	1.93
POSITIVE PARENTING_FATHER	.130	.416	.045	.314	-.829	1.12
NEGATIVE PARENTING_FATHER	.007	.473	.002	.014	-1.14	1.04
POSITIVE PARENTING_MOTHER	.688	.436	.237	1.58	-.240	1.69
NEGATIVE PARENTING_MOTHER	-.610	.428	-.188	-1.42	-1.79	.406

* $p < .05$

With close friendships as the dependent variable, the regression equation was also not significant ($F(9,60) = 1.62, p = .13$), with an R^2 of .196. Family type was not a significant predictor of close friendships, and nor were any of the other variables (see table below).

Table 51

Linear Regression predicting close friendships (N = 70)

Variable	Unstandardised Beta	S.E	β	<i>t</i>	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Constant	12.13	2.38		5.10	7.69	17.2
Age	-.161	.426	-.050	-.379	-1.07	.678
Gender	.731	.930	.099	.786	-1.28	2.48
Family structure	-.427	1.25	-.045	-.340	-3.27	2.84
FAMILY TYPE	-.136	.974	-.018	-.139	-2.16	1.88
Ethnicity	.852	1.21	.090	.704	-1.08	3.12
POSITIVE PARENTING_FATHER	1.06	.562	.274	1.89	-.316	2.39
NEGATIVE PARENTING_FATHER	-.219	.639	-.051	-.343	-1.39	1.17
POSITIVE PARENTING_MOTHER	-.119	.588	-.030	-.203	-1.34	1.30
NEGATIVE PARENTING_MOTHER	-1.32	.578	-.302	-2.28	-2.66	-.049

* $p < .05$

With self-compassion as the dependent variable, a significant regression equation was found ($F(9,61) = 2.21, p < .05$), with an R^2 of .246. Parenting was not a significant predictor of self-compassion (see table below) but family type was ($\beta = -.390, t = -3.10, p < .01$) such that adolescent only-children were higher on self-compassion than adolescent non-only children.

Table 52

Linear Regression predicting self-compassion (N = 70)

Variable	Unstandardised Beta	S.E	β	t	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Constant	39.06	4.32		9.03	29.2	49.3
Age	.652	.779	.107	.837	-1.18	2.21
Gender	.622	1.70	.044	.366	-2.66	3.81
Family structure	.300	2.29	.017	.131	-3.25	4.03
FAMILY TYPE	-5.50	1.77	-.390	-3.10**	-8.94	-2.25
Ethnicity	-2.62	2.10	-.149	-1.25	-6.59	1.89
POSITIVE PARENTING_FATHER	.785	1.02	.107	.769	-1.29	2.94
NEGATIVE PARENTING_FATHER	.386	1.17	.047	.331	-1.65	2.78
POSITIVE PARENTING_MOTHER	1.69	1.07	.229	1.59	.054	3.70
NEGATIVE PARENTING_MOTHER	-1.69	1.06	-.204	-1.60	-4.34	.795

** $p < .01$

With life satisfaction as the dependent variable, a significant regression equation was also found ($F(9,61) = 4.82, p < .001$), with an R^2 of .416. Family type was not a significant predictor of life satisfaction (see table below) but two variables were; family structure ($\beta = .363, t = 3.25, p < .01$) such that intact families were predictive of better life satisfaction than other family structures, and positive parenting from mothers ($\beta = .515, t = 4.05, p < .01$) such that more positive parenting from mothers was predictive of better life satisfaction. The best predictor of life satisfaction was positive parenting (see table below).

Table 53

Linear Regression predicting life satisfaction (N = 71)

Variable	Unstandardised Beta	S.E	β	t	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Constant	21.46	4.04		5.31	12.5	29.8
Age	-.355	.728	-.055	-.487	-1.84	1.19
Gender	-.685	1.59	-.046	-.431	-3.79	2.54
Family structure	6.97	2.14	.363	3.25**	1.88	12.1
FAMILY TYPE	-.374	1.66	-.025	-.226	-3.92	3.13
Ethnicity	.205	1.96	.011	.105	-3.63	4.34
POSITIVE PARENTING_FATHER	-.389	.954	-.050	-.408	-2.80	1.94
NEGATIVE PARENTING_FATHER	-1.90	1.09	-.220	-1.74	-4.82	1.11
POSITIVE PARENTING_MOTHER	4.04	.997	.515	4.05**	1.45	6.39
NEGATIVE PARENTING_MOTHER	.699	.988	.079	.708	-1.64	3.48

** $p < .01$

7.1.2 Observation data analysis

7.1.2.1 How do parent-adolescent interactions compare between one-child and multiple children families?

To compare parent-adolescent observed interactions in single child and multiple children families, Mann-Whitney U-tests were conducted on the parent scales, child scales, and parent-adolescent interaction scales. Findings are presented under six sections: mother scales, father scales, child scales (with mother), child scales (with father), mother-adolescent interaction scales and father-adolescent interaction scales.

Mother scales

The two groups did not differ significantly on any of the 11 mother scales ($p > .05$). See table below.

Table 54

Mann Whitney U Test testing differences between mothers in SCF (N = 13) and NSCF (N = 13)

Variable		Sum of ranks	Median	U	p
Quality of drawing	SCF	165.0	4.00	74.0	.569
	NSCF	186.0	4.00		
New starts	SCF	169.0	0.00	78.0	.317
	NSCF	182.0	0.00		
Dial take over	SCF	162.5	0.00	71.5	.149
	NSCF	188.5	0.00		
Non-verbal control	SCF	183.0	9.00	77.0	.576
	NSCF	168.0	9.00		
Criticism	SCF	182.0	5.00	78.0	.317
	NSCF	169.0	5.00		
Sensitivity	SCF	171.5	5.00	80.5	.805
	NSCF	179.5	5.00		

Rough physical handling	SCF	175.5	3.00	84.5	1.00
	NSCF	175.5	3.00		
Dissatisfaction	SCF	162.0	2.00	71.0	.474
	NSCF	189.0	3.00		
Satisfaction	SCF	194.0	2.00	66.0	.319
	NSCF	157.0	2.00		
Emotional condition	SCF	173.0	8.00	82.0	.893
	NSCF	178.0	8.00		
Vocalisation	SCF	170.5	4.00	79.5	.768
	NSCF	180.5	4.00		

* $p < .05$

Father scales

Similar to mothers, the two groups did not differ significantly on any of the father scales ($p > .05$). See table below.

Table 55

Mann Whitney U Test testing differences between fathers in SCF (N = 8) and NSCF (N = 13)

Variable		Sum of ranks	Median	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Quality of drawing	SCF	82.0	4.50	46.0	.627
	NSCF	149.0	5.00		
New starts	SCF	82.5	0.00	46.5	.559
	NSCF	148.5	0.00		
Dial take over	SCF	94.5	0.00	45.5	.202
	NSCF	136.5	0.00		
Non-verbal control	SCF	83.0	9.00	47.0	.595
	NSCF	148.0	9.00		
Criticism	SCF	92.0	5.00	48.0	.433
	NSCF	139.0	5.00		
Sensitivity	SCF	87.5	4.50	51.5	.969

	NSCF	143.5	4.00		
Rough physical handling	SCF	88.0	3.00	52.0	1.00
	NSCF	143.0	3.00		
Dissatisfaction	SCF	85.0	4.00	49.0	.819
	NSCF	146.0	4.00		
Satisfaction	SCF	77.5	2.50	41.5	.431
	NSCF	153.5	3.00		
Emotional condition	SCF	97.0	8.50	43.0	.504
	NSCF	134.0	7.00		
Vocalisation	SCF	88.5	4.00	51.5	.953
	NSCF	142.5	4.00		

* $p < .05$

Child scales (with mother)

For the child scales, the two groups differed significantly on persistence/attention scale. Persistence/attention while on task with the mother was greater for adolescent only-children ($Mdn = 9$; $Rank\ sums = 201.5$) than for adolescent non-only children ($Mdn = 9$; $Rank\ sums = 149.5$), $U = 58.5$, $p = .033$, $r = .417$. No other significant group differences were found (see table below).

Table 56

Mann Whitney U Test testing differences between adolescents in SCF ($N = 13$) and NSCF ($N = 13$)

Variable		Sum of ranks	Median	U	p
Dial take over	SCF	172.5	0.00	81.5	.863
	NSCF	178.5	0.00		
Dissatisfaction	SCF	179.0	4.00	81.0	.853
	NSCF	172.0	4.00		
Satisfaction	SCF	149.5	1.00	58.5	.159
	NSCF	201.5	2.00		
Emotional condition	SCF	175.0	8.00	84.0	.979

	NSCF	176.0	7.00		
Criticism	SCF	175.5	5.00	84.5	1.00
	NSCF	175.5	5.00		
Persistence/Attention	SCF	201.5	9.00	58.5	.033*
	NSCF	149.5	9.00		
Level of activity	SCF	183.5	3.00	76.5	.653
	NSCF	167.5	3.00		
Readiness for social interaction	SCF	188.5	9.00	71.5	.441
	NSCF	162.5	9.00		
Vocalisation	SCF	191.5	4.00	68.5	.344
	NSCF	159.5	3.00		

* $p < .05$

Child scales (with father)

By contrast, the two groups did not differ significantly on any child scales with the father ($p > .05$) as shown in table below.

Table 57

Mann Whitney U Test testing differences between adolescents in SCF (N = 8) and NSCF (N = 13)

Variable		Sum of ranks	Median	U	p
Dial take over	SCF	84.5	0.00	48.5	.762
	NSCF	146.5	0.00		
Dissatisfaction	SCF	73.0	3.00	37.0	.263
	NSCF	158.0	4.00		
Satisfaction	SCF	102.0	2.00	38.0	.280
	NSCF	129.0	2.00		
Emotional condition	SCF	88.5	7.50	51.5	.970
	NSCF	142.5	7.00		
Criticism	SCF	86.5	5.00	50.5	.884
	NSCF	144.5	5.00		

Persistence/Attention	SCF	89.5	9.00	50.5	.858
	NSCF	141.5	9.00		
Level of activity	SCF	73.5	3.00	37.5	.267
	NSCF	157.5	3.00		
Readiness for social	SCF	81.0	8.50	45.0	.573
interaction	NSCF	150.0	9.00		
Vocalisation	SCF	89.0	3.50	51.0	.937
	NSCF	142.0	4.00		

* $p < .05$

Mother-adolescent interaction scales

The two groups also did not differ significantly on the two mother-adolescent scales ($p > .05$). See table below.

Table 58

Mann Whitney U Test testing differences between mother-adolescent interaction in SCF (N = 13) and NSCF (N = 13)

Variable		Sum of ranks	Median	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Harmony	SCF	173.5	8.00	82.5	.915
	NSCF	177.5	8.00		
Control	SCF	182.0	4.00	78.0	.735
	NSCF	169.0	4.00		

* $p < .05$

Father-adolescent interaction scales

Likewise the two groups did not differ significantly on the two father-adolescent scales ($p > .05$). See table below.

Table 59

Mann Whitney U Test testing differences between father-adolescent interaction in SCF (N = 8) and NSCF (N = 13)

Variable		Sum of ranks	Median	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Harmony	SCF	89.0	8.50	51.0	.939
	NSCF	142.0	8.00		
Control	SCF	85.0	5.00	49.0	.827
	NSCF	146.0	6.00		

**p* < .05

7.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In this chapter findings are in relation to the overarching research questions of the current study:

1) Is there any relationship between parenting and number of children?

- Number of children did not significantly predict maternal or paternal positive or negative parenting (parental self-reports and adolescent reports).
- There were no significant differences between one-child and non-one child families on parent-adolescent interactions except that only-children showed more persistence/attention when on task with the mother than children with siblings.

2) Is there any relationship between parenting and adolescent well-being?

- Problem levels increase as negative parenting increases and positive parenting decreases (mothers' and fathers' reports).
- Life satisfaction and social acceptance increase as positive parenting from mothers increases whereas close friendships decrease as negative parenting from mothers increases (adolescent reports).

- Life satisfaction and close friendships amongst adolescents increase as positive parenting from fathers increases while problem levels increase as negative parenting from fathers increases (adolescent reports).
- More paternal negative parenting was predictive of more difficulties in adolescents (fathers' reports).
- More positive parenting from mothers was predictive of less difficulties and better life satisfaction in adolescents (adolescent reports).

3) Are there any differences in parenting and adolescent wellbeing in relation to the demographic background of the families?

Parenting and demographic variables

- Older adolescents received less negative parenting from fathers than younger ones.
- Girls received more positive parenting from mothers than boys.
- Adolescents from families with one step-parent scored higher on maternal negative parenting than those from intact families and fathers from single-parent families scored higher on positive parenting than fathers from intact families with biological parents. In fact, intact families with two-parents predicted more positive parenting from fathers than other family structures.

Does number of children matter?

- Adolescent only-children reported themselves as more self-compassionate than adolescent non-only children.
- When other variables are taken into account, being a non-only child was predictive of more difficulties than being an only-child.

Adolescent wellbeing and other demographic variables

- Male adolescents scored higher on problem levels than female adolescents (SDQ total difficulties and impact score) from maternal reports and self-reports.

- Female adolescents rated themselves as higher on social acceptance than male adolescents.
- Adolescents from step-families scored higher on SDQ Impact score than adolescents from intact two-parent families. In fact, intact families with two-parents was predictive of better life satisfaction than other family structures.

The next chapter will outline the qualitative findings from the interviews. These aimed to address more specific research questions within the aforementioned broader questions; that is, 1) what is the adolescent's experience of being an only child or a child with sibling/s?; 2) is there any influence of parent and child gender on parenting? and, 3) what is the experience of child-centred parenting? The aim is to use the qualitative outcomes to increase our understanding of the quantitative findings; a reflection of the study's embedded design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

CHAPTER VIII: FAMILY INTERVIEW RESULTS

SINGLE-CHILD FAMILIES vs. NON-SINGLE CHILD FAMILIES

This chapter reports the findings from the 30 interviews with adolescents (only-children and non-only children) and the 30 interviews with parents (single-child families and non-single child families). Codes are used throughout this section when presenting extracts containing information about the speaker. They are as follows:

Family type:	SCF = Single-Child Family; NSCF = Non Single-Child Family
Family structure:	SP = Single-Parent; STF = Step-Family
Participants:	Mother or Father OR Mother and Father ('We') Adolescents: OC = Only-Child; NOC = Non Only-Child (Male or Female)

For each research question, themes and sub-themes common to both family types (if any) as well as contrasting themes and sub-themes (if any) are presented. Any themes specific to only the SCF or the NSCF are also presented. This section provides a detailed outline of five areas of interest (identified using thematic analysis), which are: 1) parenting, 2) parent-adolescent relationship, 3) living in a single or multiple child family at adolescence; 4) peer relationships; 5) reasons for having an only-child or more than one³.

8.1 WHAT ARE ADOLESCENTS' AND PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTING?

This reflects the young adolescents' experience of being parented and how parents of young adolescents engage in parenting. Six themes common to both groups were identified: authoritative parenting; parental perceptions of the practice of authoritarian parenting; child-centred parenting; parenting practices: (parental behavioural control and parental involvement); absence of parental overindulgence; and overprotection.

³ See Appendices 22 and 23 for an overview of the thematic maps of the main themes and their corresponding sub-themes.

THEME 1: Authoritative parenting

ADOLESCENT INTERVIEWS

More than half NOC related to their parents as being rather flexible with them whilst also ensuring that they followed the rules. Similar perceptions were reported by a few OC who described their parents as easy-going although these parents also set clear boundaries as to their expectations across different levels. Thus, authoritative parenting was common to both family types but less prevalent in SCF than NSCF from the adolescent's perspective.

I can usually [long pause] yeah I can usually usually do like...like when I was back- I was allowed on computer but I...I'm not allowed to watch TV like anytime in the day. OC Male

Just earlier my mum asked if I would like to go... Because on Fridays I have got teacher training day and I would like to go with my friends to a movie by myself so I think it's not limited but there is like a... It comes to a point where they would say no. NOC Female

PARENT INTERVIEWS

Authoritative parenting was also reported by parents in both SCF and NSCF. However in SCF, this parenting style was adopted by less than half of the mothers who described themselves mostly as 'firm but fair'. They were all very clear about the importance of setting boundaries while simultaneously being easy-going and flexible towards the child to meet their needs. They tried to draw the child's attention to consequences of misbehaviours in order to keep them on track. This type of parenting was not specifically identified amongst any of the fathers of a singleton.

We always talk about things. I know we do... I know we shouldn't but we do compare with other children so I will tell her I will set boundaries but I have never taken anything off her. I would never say you can't have your phone... I have never done that. SCF-Mother_SP

By contrast, the use of authoritative parenting in NSCF cut across mothers as well as fathers. That is, in the majority of NSCF mothers and/or fathers both

viewed themselves as ‘firm, fair...nurturing’ parents with an emphasis on them being rather easy-going but also setting clear boundaries to regulate their child’s behaviours.

I think we’re kind of easy going really, I don’t, I mean I don’t think we are very strict, but we are also sort of explaining why we say no and often they understand it then...and if we are, if they want to do something, we hardly ever say no really, we try to enable them to...have as many experiences as possible. **NSCF-Mother**

They think you’re their friend. But I keep on saying to them “no I’m not your friend I’m friendly with you” [...] But at the same time sometimes I would have to say no and that’s when they don’t like it. Sometimes I can be a little bit strict. **NSCF-Father**

THEME 2: Parental perceptions of the practice of authoritarian parenting

Some form of authoritarian parenting was adopted in both family types although this seemed to be more prevalent in NSCF than SCF. This reflected mostly the disciplinarian role taken by one or both of the parents.

In the SCF some mothers and fathers took the role of a disciplinarian to regulate the young adolescent’s behaviours – ‘*NO, in this house this is the rule! We follow this*’. They showed themselves as quite ‘strict’ towards the child when they felt that such was necessary. They all believed that it was important to set clear boundaries in relation to what the child can or cannot do and expected the child to abide by the rules they set. Although this type of parenting cut across different family structures it was more prevalent in step-families (half of these parents were from step-families) and in particular from the step-parent.

F: I would tell him not to and he won’t do it. There isn’t... There isn’t... I think [Child’s mother] does all that... All the reasoning at that point has already been done, isn’t it?

M: Ya. If that has not worked...

F: So I would literally go oye do it! Now! Or oye what do you think you’re doing? That would be it.

SCF-Mother & Father_STF

In the NSCF, this parenting style with an emphasis on *'it doesn't really matter it's my house it's my rule'*, was even more prevalent amongst mothers than fathers who showed themselves as quite 'strict' and 'firm' with their child in some situations while setting very clear boundaries for the child to respect. Much importance was attributed to the adherence to rules in the house and the child was expected not to cross any set 'limits'. These parents took their role of a disciplinarian very seriously and exercised a significant amount of parental authority. Unlike the SCF, this sample was all nuclear families with biological parents.

A different way of parenting that we have to some people is that we are their parents we are not their friends so there has to be... There are boundaries there are limits and they are rules and if they are not followed then there are consequences for rules that are not followed and we've always very much been like that you know. NSCF-Mother

Moreover, amongst parents with more than one child there was a general agreement that mothers were 'stricter' than fathers although reference was made to the fact that in some of these families this was the outcome of mothers being 'more around' than fathers.

THEME 3: Child-centred parenting

ADOLESCENT INTERVIEWS

The majority of adolescents in both groups felt that their needs and interests were valued by their parents. Four sub-themes were identified from adolescent reports: child's happiness, parental guidance, freedom and the role of the child in family decision-making.

Child's happiness

Some OC explained that their parents protected them so they were always safe. With specific reference to mothers, some OC reported that they did not feel 'judged' by their mothers, the latter *'always makes sure that I'm happy'*, displayed a lot of understanding towards them and often praised them to encourage them. This was the case for some NOC only.

Even if it's weird, she will understand you know? She'll still tell me, "oh yes" you know, she'll still give me advice on it, and all of that. So I still, yeah. So I definitely like – I want like a child that's really comfortable to ME (small laugh) and can share anything. **OC-Female**

Interestingly, most of the OC stated that their parents did not have any specific expectations towards them as their only-child. This was also the case for most NOC who pointed out that both parents did not have any specific expectations towards them in relation to their birth order; that is, being the eldest sibling or the middle or even the youngest in the family.

I don't think that I have anything that I HAVE to do because I don't have siblings. **OC-Female**

We kind of have like the same responsibilities which isn't much to begin with anyway. **NOC-Male**

Parental guidance

The majority of NOC emphasised the role played by their parents as 'mentors' who give them advice in relation to everyday issues. It seems that their parents invested significantly in guiding them as young adolescents. Parental guidance was not identified among the OC.

Well they both give me good advice. **NOC-Female**

Freedom

In terms of freedom, for the OC, the situation was such that '*I do like having that freedom just to go anywhere, not have to worry about someone [...]*'. Almost all of the OC reported enjoying quite a lot of freedom in terms of being able to move around, going to different places such as visiting friends, staying on their own sometimes as well as walking or travelling to school. One of the OC explained that she enjoyed even more freedom explicitly as a result of being an only-child with no siblings to 'worry about'.

I mean I'd say I have quite a lot of freedom. I mean, this, like I mean I don't... go out that much. When I do my mum always lets me if I come back at like a normal time. And I can as long as I finish my homework and

do all of that like I can do whatever I want at home most of the time so...

OC-Female

For most OC, freedom of choice seemed to be part and parcel of their experience of being parented. They explained that their parents usually respected their privacy such that *'she does not really get involved in stuff like I don't want her to get involved'* and they were usually allowed to make their own decisions or choices whereby nothing is 'forced' on them.

[...] Like she won't go do things like I don't want her to go to like if I don't want her to help me with certain things she won't do it. It's in a way almost anti-that but in a way it's actually showing more affection than if I think parents are obsessed about you. **OC-Male**

Freedom of choice was implemented by mothers much more than the fathers in the SCF.

Similar to the OC, almost all the NOC enjoyed quite a lot of freedom granted to them by their parents. They were also allowed to go out, roam around with friends, be on their own and do most of the activities they were interested in and that were reasonable; that is, not too 'dangerous'.

Um, really...but like they keep me back from big things that are like just too dangerous and that...but they let me do most things that I want to do
NOC-Male

Interestingly, in sharp contrast with an only-child, one NOC did report less freedom of movement as a result of having a sibling.

I don't go out to the park by myself or like I don't go anywhere by myself really. Erm because otherwise (sibling) will want to follow me. **NOC-Female**

Role of the child in family decision-making

Nearly half of the OC adolescents felt they had quite a lot of say in family decision-making such as saying - *'But then I said, "I didn't want it to change" and then, she didn't change it!'* They reported that their opinions mattered, they always participated in the family-decision making process, their mothers in

particular often encouraged them to have an input in family decisions and sometimes the parents would even let them have the last say in this process.

Moving house... If I didn't like the bedroom if I didn't like where it was my parents would always let me have a say. They would never go "we are buying a house we don't care what you say" [...] If it's like a minor thing they would be like "come on it's only a minor thing" OC-Female

Most OC seemed to be involved in a shared family decision-making process whereby decisions are made by parents and children through negotiations in respect of each other as equal partners.

My grandma is usually the one who would take some holiday so it's as a group choice really. If there is really some place which I don't want to go to then we won't go there because my opinion is obviously valued and... But yeah we would just...kind of compromise if we don't like or anything like that. OC-Female

However, in a few SCF the parents remained in charge of all major family decisions.

But when...when we bought this house I didn't get an opinion because I was only...it was a matter of...there's only a matter of choice in...is...yeah I wasn't....I was allowed to say...which one looked good...but... [...] they took it into account... OC-Male

By contrast, the majority of the NOC reported engaging in shared family-decision making with some NOC highlighting that their parents valued their opinions although all decisions were made mostly as a family. Similar to some SCF, some NOC also reported that their parents mostly remained in charge of major family decisions. Overall, fewer NOC reported having quite a lot of say.

So earlier I had to decide what we were having for dinner, but like in terms of where we go then if it's like go to the cinema what are we going to watch...then that or like...I usually do research on stuff so if like my mum and dad say "ooh, maybe we want to get this for the house". Then I

like to go and do the research and find like which one is the lower price and stuff like that and then I get to say like it's not really worth getting this or we should definitely get this or...stuff like that. But, holiday not really cause like Mauritius is where the family is so, we go there. NOC-Female

PARENT INTERVIEWS

Child-centredness according to parents was reflected on specific levels such as the parents' endeavours to prioritise the needs and interests of the child; ensure child's happiness and provide freedom of choice to the child; act as a guide to the child; and, the role played by the child in family decision-making. These were seen to a similar extent in both groups, regardless of number of children. Two sub-themes specific to only SCF were also identified: parental investment and putting the child first.

Prioritising the needs and interests of the child

In about two-thirds of SCF, parents reported showing a lot of understanding towards their young adolescent, which perhaps characterises them as empathetic parents. It is worth noting that more mothers than fathers reported being empathetic towards their onlie.

We let her know that it's not her fault. And we try to understand both sides of it...so we ask her to tell us everything, tell us what happened. [...] And if she not at all at fault, we make sure she knows that she's not at all at fault. SCF-Mother

In a similar proportion of NSCF families both mothers and fathers were identified as empathetic parents who displayed a lot of understanding towards their child.

M: He was on Instagram and I looked at his Instagram and there was someone who passed as a child and [name of child] thought it was a child and he was saying something inappropriate [...] and I was like "it wasn't your fault, you are not an adult, you haven't done anything wrong and if someone says anything inappropriate in the future just delete them or

block them". You know just not make them feel bad because he does beat himself up sometimes, doesn't he?

F: yeah especially when he thinks he's done something wrong when he hasn't.

NSCF-Mother & Father_STF

Child's happiness and freedom of choice

In nearly all of the SCF both mothers and fathers aspired for their singleton to be happy above all – ‘*We just want him to be happy, don't we?*’ Although some of these parents described their personal preferences in terms of what they thought would be good choices for their child's future (e.g. good education, a well-paid job, a family), none of them held on to any aspirations of their own for their child if at the expense of the child's happiness.

Uhm, I...the key thing is I want her to grow up and be happy. I mean, I'm...I've said it'll be lovely if she goes on to university and uhm, you know, and I hope that one day she'll have her own children because I think that's a LOVELY, BEAUTIFUL, experience. And fundamentally, I WANT her to be happy. **SCF-Father_STF**

Similarly, the majority of the NSCF (mothers and/or fathers) aspired for their child to be happy first and foremost. They also seemed prepared to put aside their own personal aspirations for their child's future if such did not match the child's own aspirations.

M: I don't know I just hope he's happy and secure when he grows up. I hope that he has a good life and does not struggle. I hope he doesn't... I don't know... Need therapy for anything! (Both laugh)

F: yeah we want him to be like happy and...

M: just happy and successful at whatever he does.

NSCF-Mother & Father_STF

The majority of the parents in the SCF group (both mothers and/or fathers) reflected the only-children's perception of freedom of choice from their parents. That is, they mostly allowed their singleton to make their own choices including

decisions pertaining to their future while also being present to support and guide them.

[...] her dad always said “I don’t care, you could be working on a check out anywhere” and I’d say “don’t say that to her” (laughs) [...] and I’ll say to her “you know, if you, as long as you try hard at your work, you do your best, I don’t mind” uhm, you know, the result I don’t mind [...]

SCF-Mother

Freedom of choice also characterised parenting in NSCF across both mothers and fathers and was perhaps even more prevalent here with nearly all parents reporting this aspect.

Parental guidance

Although only reported by NOC in adolescent interviews, the importance attached to ‘guiding’ the child was noteworthy amongst nearly all parents in both SCF and NSCF. In the SCF, both parents engaged in guiding their young adolescent but this was more prominent amongst mothers than fathers. By contrast, mothers and fathers from NSCF seemed to be more or less equally involved in acting as a guide to their child. Guidance mainly involved giving advice, some form of teaching (e.g. hobbies and interests) and, accompanying the child through the decision-making process. Therefore, this aspect of child-centred parenting underlies support and understanding from parents in both family types.

I think it will just fall in place cause we always guide her in a good way...so hopefully she’ll take our advice cause we’ve been there. We just try to make her understand. I think the older she gets, she does begin to understand where we are coming from, so hopefully... **SCF-Father**

Yeah, there wasn’t any other option that was ever discussed and I think, you know, opening it up to him to, to be able to choose where he wants to go to make sure it’s the right way for him. We’ll give him guidance.

NSCF-Mother

Family decision-making

Nearly half of the parents from SCF encouraged their adolescent only-child to have a say in family decision-making. They promoted shared decision-making; although they ‘allow her to have a voice’, they also focussed on setting some boundaries on the extent to which the child influences family decisions.

It's a family house. Rather than parent-child. SCF-Mother_STF

As far as the NSCF were concerned, in some of the families, mothers seemed to be mostly in charge of making decisions in the family whilst in the remaining families decisions were mostly a joint responsibility of both parents with the child less involved.

I guess it's mum!' or it's 50-50. NSCF-Father

As such, the dynamics of family decision-making seem to differ between SCF and NSCF whereby the only-child seems to have more say than the child with sibling/s.

Parental investment

A particularly high level of parental investment to meet specific needs of the child was reported by some mothers in the SCF but by no parents in the NSCF. For example, private tutoring; being involved in and supporting the child's interests including sports activities; satisfying all needs and wants of the child; and, giving the best education to the child.

He is an, he's our only child so...he is gonna get...mostly what he needs...

SCF-Mother

Putting the child first

There were a few parents in the SCF who adopted a very child-centred parenting approach to an extent that they were prepared to put their child first regardless of any negative effect on their own happiness. However, this sub-theme was not identified in the NSCF. For example, one father chose not to have another child for the sake of his only-child who was not too keen on having a sibling. Similarly there were mothers who went the extra mile, for example, by trying to

accommodate their child's choices, need for attention, by adapting their parenting to suit the child (especially one who has no siblings for emotional support) and, by making sure that their child never feels left out.

Um, I've been talking to one of the mothers once and she kissed me and kept her mouth there to stop me from talking. Hmm, she needs my attention a lot. She, when my husband, my husband and I are having conversation... she's always got some reason to, um, interrupt. It's like "I'm here as well" so she does always that, she NEEDS one of our attention, which is good, we give her a lot of attention but we've got used to not, to having conversation once she's gone to bed (laughs)...

SCF-Mother

THEME 4: Parenting practices

ADOLESCENT INTERVIEWS

The theme parenting practices comprises two sub-themes: parental behavioural control and parental involvement. Parental behavioural control, a form of parenting practices as a means to regulate child behaviour, is further subdivided into disciplinary approach and, parent-child conflict and resolution.

Parental behavioural control

Disciplinary approach

In the SCF, adolescents reported different disciplinary strategies used by their parents. Some OC explained that their mothers often tried to reason with them in order to discipline them, which reflects the use of a soft disciplinary approach. These mothers tried to show some understanding towards the child and hoped to be able to discipline them through dialogue and negotiations.

*I mean she just usually says that she is disappointed in me and like she basically explains what I did wrong if I don't really get what I did wrong. Then we usually like if it's like we don't agree over anything we usually try to come up with a solution to the problem we're having, so like a compromise... So I think that's it. **OC-Female***

For the majority of the OC, most of the mothers and some, but fewer, fathers also relied on the use of positive reinforcers such as ‘sweets’, ‘presents’, and any other ‘stuff’ the child is interested in to discipline them and sometimes as rewards for positive behaviour.

Sometimes he gets me presents if I have been good or I have done something really good like I just went to France with my school and...

Yeah. OC-Female

For most of the OC, the majority of the mothers and nearly half of the fathers equally used some form of negative reinforcement such as ‘take my phone, my iPad off me’, ‘shouting’, and ‘one-week ban’ from using the mobile phone. This use of negative reinforcement as a disciplinary approach showed little influence of parent gender.

She got annoyed at that, so she went out, she came out and she was like, “what did we...you don’t even need your phone so no more phone!”

OC-Female

NOC also reported different parental disciplinary strategies; that is, negative reinforcement and also, punishment. However, reasoning and positive reinforcement were not reported in this group. Negative reinforcement was used by the majority of the mothers and some fathers in this family type. Notably, ‘shouting’ from mothers as well as fathers as a means to discipline the child was much more prominent in NSCF than SCF.

He just, he shouts at me like my mum, but only he does it way louder. So you actually feel it. And he loses his temper. He gets extremely annoyed.

NOC-Male

A few NOC reported that they were also sometimes ‘grounded’ by their mothers as a form of punishment.

Parent-child conflict and resolution

Nearly half of the adolescents in both groups reported experiencing parent-child conflict. Whilst conflict with parents occurred with both mothers and fathers amongst the OC, the NOC mostly experienced conflict with their mothers only.

Well, he'll say why did you have to do that? cause usually I have arguments with my mum, so he's like what have you done?! NOC-Female

Interestingly, for those OC who reported some parent-child conflict, some of them actually had more conflicts with their father than mother.

I don't really fall out that much with my mum. It's mostly my dad I fall out with. OC-Male

Conflict resolutions between mothers and daughters were mostly similar in the two family types involving apologies, 'hugging' and 'moving on' by just 'forgetting' about the conflict. Mothers of NOC daughters were more likely to use reasoning, 'avoiding' and complaining to the other parent. Conflict resolutions between mothers and sons were also mostly similar in the two family types, involving apologies, 'hugging', 'forgetting' as well as some form of compensation.

Fathers with OC daughters were also reported to apologise, 'hug', 'forget' as well as reason with the child, as were fathers with NOC daughters, who additionally used humour. Similar conflict resolution strategies between fathers and OC sons were used although some would 'just don't talk to each other' for a while. Complaining to the other parent was also highlighted by one of the NOC. As for NOC sons the adolescents reported that it was all about apologies, reasoning and 'forgetting'. Overall, there does not seem to be much difference in how adolescents perceive conflict resolution with their parents between family types or by parent and child gender.

PARENT INTERVIEWS

Parental behavioural control was also a sub-theme identified in the parent interviews and further divided into disciplinary approach and, monitoring and supervision.

Parental behavioural control

Disciplinary approach

In the SCF and in line with some of the OC, a few mothers reported that they often 'do try and reason with [the child]' which again highlights the use of a

soft disciplinary approach. Furthermore, as seen in the OC interviews, the majority of their parents incorporated the use of negative reinforcement as a means to discourage ‘bad’ behaviours from the child, for example, ‘taking his electronics from him’, ‘take her phone away’, or ‘turn off the Internet’.

“[...] if you behave like that, you don’t listen to us, this is what’s going to happen...” **SCF-Mother & Father**

Nearly half of the mothers in the SCF reported ‘shouting’ at their child if the latter misbehaves generally. Interestingly, a few mothers showed remorse after having shouted at their child.

I’d probably lose my temper too quickly... (laughs)...and shout and then regret that I’ve shouted at him... **SCF-Mother**

Nearly half of the mothers in SCF also said they relied on positive reinforcement in the form of ‘rewards’ to encourage the child to maintain good behaviours including performance-oriented behaviours.

No no no I don’t punish her. That’s absolutely out of question because I don’t believe that children should be punished. It’s more about rewarding them and this is what I have been trying to do since she was very very small. **SCF-Mother**

For NSCF, the majority of parents including both mothers and fathers relied on negative reinforcement to deal with adolescent behavioural issues. However in comparison with the SCF, only a few NSCF fathers also used some form of positive reinforcement. For example,

Like last week for instance of spending an hour or two doing something either educational or towards a larger goal and then we earn more money per week! It’s more like positive reinforcement rather than sanctions.

NSCF-Father

Monitoring and supervision

Parents’ endeavours to monitor and supervise their young adolescent were common to both SCF and NSCF. These mainly revolved around the child’s activities outside of home as well as online. In the SCF group, the majority of the

families reported that they 'know where she's going', 'know exactly what he's doing', 'know the group of friends she is with', and 'go through you know how she's going to be safe'. As stated by one mother:

I have got 'find my phone' on my phone, so I usually just have a quick look that he's actually in the vicinity that he said he's going to [...] so I do sort of monitor and I ask, when he comes in, oh where have you been, what have you been up to, and I can tell if something has gone on. **SCF-Mother**

Nearly half of the SCF parents seemed to be very cautious about their adolescent's online activities especially on social media. They were very aware of the dangers of the online world and hence preoccupied with ensuring that their young teenager was safe online and not exposed to any type of inappropriate website.

Well she's got a YouTube channel which I was quite reluctant about first because social media just has ways to make children of that age and they are up to bullying and all sorts but all of her friends have got it and I did make her wait until she was 13 so she's only recently got it [...] so I keep an eye on what she is posting on that so if she is posting anything which I think is inappropriate or anything like that I tell her to take it down.

SCF-Mother_SP

Similarly, the majority of the NSCF parents monitored and supervised the activities of their young adolescent outside of home including keeping a close eye on online activities. Regardless of the number of children in the family, parents of a young adolescent generally felt the need to protect their growing child who is considered to be quite vulnerable.

F: when she goes out with her friends we've got her on her phone on 'find my family' thing, haven't we?

M: sssshhh... She doesn't know!

F: she does.

M: Oh! (Laughs)

NSCF-Mother & Father

Parental involvement

Parental involvement, as the other sub-theme of parenting practices, reflected the amount of time parents spent with their young adolescent including the extent to which they participated in the child's activities.

ADOLESCENT INTERVIEWS

A sharp contrast between OC and NOC was observed regarding the extent to which adolescents perceived their parents to be involved in their activities, as well as the amount of time they spent together. Almost all of the OC reported that they spent a considerable amount of time with their mother as well as their father and were very often engaged in some form of activity together such as watching TV, sports, studying, playing games or simply just 'doing stuff together'. These OC were comfortable around their parents and viewed spending time with each of their parents as normal. In fact, one of the OC expressed her happiness that '*it's nice spending time with each other at home and doing stuff together*'. Similarly, another OC stated that:

Hmmm I keep saying shall we go do Squash? Cause she said she like said do you want to do Squash sometime? That's when it started. I was like yeah ok! And we went to play Squash and we keep playing Squash now because we enjoy it and I just keep saying Mum should we go and play Squash? And she was like yeah booked it... OC-Male

Although these adolescents spent a lot of time with both of their parents, for some OC, their father was less involved in doing activities with them than their mother. For a few this might be because the mother was more present than the father who was at work most of the time.

My dad is usually out more because he works some or most weekends so we usually don't go out like together like my mum and I do... But we sometimes go to the movies and stuff like that. OC-Male

More than half of the OC thought that their mother was highly involved in different activities and they appreciated and experienced this as a form of maternal support and encouragement. These mothers sometimes actively took part

in the child's activities and/or assisted them by acting as a facilitator or they would simply ask the child 'how it's going?'

Contrastingly, in almost all the NSCF low parental involvement was identified. Whilst some NOC reported spending time 'occasionally' with their mother, other NOC felt that they did not spend much if any time doing activities with their mother. As far as the fathers were concerned, more than half of the NOC explained that they only 'occasionally' spent time with their father.

Sometimes, occasionally, not very often... We bake together. OC-Female

No we don't usually do stuff together or do specific stuff together really.

OC-Male

PARENT INTERVIEWS

Most if not all of the SCF parents felt that they were highly involved in their child's activities and interests with considerable amount of time spent together - '*We do like to spend a lot of time with each other*'. Mothers were more involved than fathers as acknowledged by both parents. Some fathers strived to be as involved as the mother but were not able to for various reasons such as work, other commitments, and in the case of co-parenting or single-child families, not being resident in the house full-time. Nonetheless, the majority of fathers showed a high level of paternal engagement except perhaps for some step-fathers.

I'd like to be as involved as I can. Uhm, you know she enjoys going swimming [...] And I'll do that with her, but because our, because our time is, is quite precious, because we only see each other for two days, uhm, you know, it's – it's a bit of a balancing act to make sure we are doing everything that's okay. SCF-Father_STF (+ co-parenting)

Maternal engagement in SCF was noteworthy. The majority of the SCF mothers were found to be enthusiastically involved in their child's school matters, very active in assisting their young adolescent in pursuing their hobbies and interests and all in all, found themselves taking an active role in the child's activities.

She was very involved in gymnastics since age 4 to age 11 ½ and I was very much involved in everything which she was doing because she was really competing at a professional level [...] and she had all these competitions during the weekends so I was going to each of those and all her competitions. I knew the culture involved I knew the club doing all sorts of things trying to help out so I was EXTREMELY involved.

SCF-Mother

High parental involvement was also reported by more than half of the NSCF parents. However, for these families high parental involvement was conceptualised as time spent as a family unit rather than the parent spending individual time with their adolescent.

F: I think as a family we do things together but [name of wife] will organise it and we will go together and do that thing not necessarily all the time but yeah

M: It's probably more of the holiday thing when we will all be together

F: yeah but we will probably go to London on a day out

M: but yeah again it will be all of us together it will not be with just [name of son]

F: yeah yeah. It's very rare that it's going to be just one of them because there is so many of them!

NSCF-Mother & Father

As such, 'one-on-one is very rare' for the NSCF parents and their adolescent. Some fathers explained that they did not spend much time with their adolescent doing activities while nearly half of the NSCF mothers reported spending time with their adolescent 'sometimes'. Similar to the SCF, fathers were recognised as being less involved than mothers. In a few cases, one parent chose to spend more time with the adolescent's sibling as a result of being of the same gender:

F: no not really... I don't think so. I do quite a lot more with just [child's brother] because he tends to...

M: we are down the gender line, aren't we?

F: yeah (laughs). I do quite a lot with [child's brother] ... Occasionally we will end up just the two of us having dinner or something like I am in late and she's in late from somewhere then we will have a chat like that but we don't often do anything that often.

NSCF-Father

THEME 5: Absence of parental overindulgence

ADOLESCENT INTERVIEWS

Neither the majority of the OC nor the NOC reported being overindulged in the sense that they were allowed to have just anything that they asked for. Both groups stated that they were encouraged by both parents to 'save up' and use their own pocket money to satisfy their wants. Most of the adolescents were told to wait for 'special occasions' to receive gifts and treats. That said, comparatively, OC were slightly more indulged by their parents than the NOC:

Cause I've got a lot of toys in our bedroom, he, he normally says, cos he buys me quite a lot, he normally says, well, if I, if I have money, you'll have to buy it yourself because I normally buy you stuff. Or like, if there's this teddy I really like that's not too expensive, he buys me but says, you need to get rid of a different teddy.

OC-Female

If it's...well we usually like check the price first of course and then if it's...erm like expensive, then she'll just be like "oh I'm sure we can find it somewhere else or like check on EBay or like ooh maybe for your birthday". Erm or otherwise I'm just like you know what, I don't need this.

NOC-Female

PARENT INTERVIEWS

In most although not all of the SCF, parents strove not to overindulge their only-child - '*She can't just have whatever she wants, whenever she wants*'. They used different strategies such as encouraging the child to save up and contribute towards buying anything extra they wanted as well as 'earning' rewards through good behaviours or doing some house chores to learn the value of money.

Nonetheless for some mothers, it was challenging to find a balance between what they could provide and the amount of effort that the child is expected to engage in,

so they could meet each other half-way. These mothers seemed to experience some form of internal conflict; perhaps they felt that they could easily satisfy their child's material needs but at the same time they were conscious of not over-indulging the child by making them too spoilt.

M: she probably gets it (laughs) if it's me, I'm a bit terrible like that, I guess I want her to have whatever she wants if we can afford it but [long pause] but...not to the point that she becomes terribly spoiled...but I think I find that hard....I will...I will buy things but-

F: I explain to people that there's a tree in our garden [Mum laughs] that only (names wife and child) can see, and it's the one where the money grows on!

M: if it's...to be fair, when she wanted an iPad, we made her save for it, and she bought an iPad herself. SCF-Mother & Father

Nearly all the NSCF parents said they did not overindulge their child - 'He doesn't get everything he wants'. They encouraged the child to 'save up' for any extras, and work for rewards with treats just on special occasions. Some parents also explained that they believed it was very important for the child to 'appreciate the value of money'. Parents in NSCF were more cautious about their finances and aspired for their child to understand that they were not allowed anything and everything unless there was a very good reason for it.

M: The sense of value, it's understanding that sense of value, and we wanted him to, if he's gonna have something big... it, I don't want him, for him to think it just comes out of the sky.

F: So you know, we will do, you know, if he wants something, say, well 'is that the right thing? You know, 'what are the other options?', 'look at that, do you need a new one?', 'is there a second hand one?' ...

NSCF-Mother & Father

THEME 6: Overprotection

ADOLESCENT INTERVIEWS

The experience of feeling overprotected was only reported by the OC and not the NOC. Almost half of the adolescent only-children explicitly stated that mothers as well as fathers were ‘overprotective towards them’. Overprotective parenting behaviours involved parental over-involvement in the child’s activities, constant and thorough monitoring of activities, parental expectations for the child to keep them in the loop when they are not at home, child feeling somewhat ‘controlled’ by the parents and also, the child’s perception of the parents as being overly concerned about them. Some OC also referred to their overprotective mother as one who would ‘put her feet down’ to protect them and who would ‘keep her eyes on me’ to ensure their safety.

Not very... My parents are VERY VERY VERY protective of me. Because the shop is up for road I have literally only been there like twice and I was like can I go with my friend? All of my friends are allowed the whole of [name of town] I am not allowed past my next-door neighbour’s house! So they are very protective. I have a lot of freedom sometimes around the village and stuff talking to my friends and they let me facetime my friends text my friends loads but towards going out they are very protective they would never let me out around in [town]. **OC-Female**

Feeling overprotected was experienced in two different ways. While for some OC it was positive, for others it was less so. For a few adolescents their parents’ overprotectiveness was a sign of affection:

(giggles), she, uh, she’s very protective of me, so like, she’ll always tell if someone talks about me, she puts her feet down and tell them, like, “oh no, that’s not right,” and then – if anything happens to me at school, she’ll make sure she like, solves it. So, she’ll talk to the teachers, and she’ll make sure I’m happy. So, that way she does show that she loves me and yeah.

OC-Female

However, for others this type of parenting was less desirable and perhaps even shunned as parental overprotection was described as a form of ‘obsession’ with the parent trying to show themselves as affectionate but not experienced as such by the adolescent. These OC did not enjoy being overprotected as it restricted their freedom.

I would say that he shows his affection BY BEING OVERPROTECTIVE like going to all my matches and stuff but I don't particularly see that as affection in a lot of ways [...] He is obsessed over everything I do like he comes to like every match I do... OC-Male

PARENT INTERVIEWS

Most parents (both mothers and fathers) of an adolescent only-child perceived themselves as very, if not overly protective of their child, and sometimes even 'overpowering'. Their parenting strongly revolved around closely monitoring the child's activities and behaviours; making sure that they were in the same vicinity as the child when the latter is socialising outside the home; intervening in the child's life (e.g. school matters) as a problem solver; making sure that the child is always safe (e.g. chauffeuring the child); being always present for the child (physically and emotionally), satisfying the child's needs, and, encouraging the child to be open with them. This cut across all the different family structures:

My other friends have got children the same age. They are letting their children cross the road by themselves. [Child] isn't quite ready for that yet and it's not that I am protecting her from doing it it's just that I keep trying and she's like 2 years behind in her learning in many subjects so... Yes so I kind of not able to let her go as much as her peers can because she's got no older brother or sister she hasn't been brought on in the same way. SCF-Mother_SP

But I do get a little bit apprehensive about when she gets into like, those social situations, when I've kind of...I'm probably a bit of a control freak to be honest. When I've not got that control, you know there's a lot of if's and but's and maybe's – And that, that worries me a little bit.

SCF-Father_STF (+ co-parenting)

There has been incidences down at the plain field where you know a car has turned up and approached a couple of kids and I just don't want it to be HER [...] I guess it's protecting her...but we have to give...to try and

find that balance of giving her freedom to you know walk to the shop and back. **SCF-Mother & Father**

Although both parents were overprotective, the majority of the mothers were much more so. This type of parenting seems to involve some amount of control that these parents perhaps aspired to maintain although without the intention to ‘suffocate’ their child. Interestingly most of these parents were conscious of their overprotective parenting behaviours and attitudes, and described themselves as ‘very much so overprotective’:

I just think that’s my baby...and there’s like people climbing on top of each other (laughs) he’s gonna get hurt! (laughing) [...] so I can’t watch him...and I say “do you want me to come and watch?” and he says I’d put him off because he knows that I’m worrying at the side lines...

SCF-Mother

The above quote reflects another aspect of overprotectiveness; being overly concerned. In fact, almost all of the SCF parents displayed this type of parenting behaviour whereby they had ‘concerns’ or ‘worries’ or felt ‘apprehensive’ or ‘anxious’ or ‘scared’ or even handicapped by some form of ‘nervousness’. Hence, they were constantly involved in almost everything that the adolescent was engaged in to ‘make sure there is nothing worrying’.

You know the regular mandate stuff. “Get ready [Child], have you had your breakfast, have you done your thing, have you put your clothes away, have you taken your Oyster card, your keys, make sure you call, make sure, you know, you look after yourself”. **SCF-Mother_STF**

Being overprotective towards one’s child was mainly seen as the outcome of having only one child:

[...] we may need to sort of think about giving her a bit more freedom...but I think sometimes when you have only got one, everything is a bit more heightened. Because you haven’t got another one to look to and learn from. **SCF-Mother & Father**

This was exacerbated by the fact that their only-child was going through adolescence. Now that the singleton was a young adolescent, parents felt the need to be even more overprotective on different levels, in particular regarding peer relationships and socialisation patterns. Their main concern was to make sure that the adolescent was safe all the time.

I still feel that she's still my baby and she's still not old enough to be what I would consider a teenager. She's never gonna play independently in the streets with her friends, uhm, she's never had the opportunity to walk anywhere by herself so I'm perhaps still a little bit too clingy in that sense.

SCF-Mother

Overprotective parenting in NSCF was reported by parents only, was only identified in less than half of the families, and stemmed from very specific reasons. For example, in one family the first born had been living as an only-child with the mother alone for almost nine years before the mother had her second child with a new partner. The nature of her overprotective parenting behaviours was quite similar to the SCF described above given her experience of parenting an only child for many years.

I just try and listen to him, try not to pass any judgement on anything that he might have done until I am able to fix it. No matter what it is I would just say I would sort it out. Like he kind of know like you know "[Child] I will fix it for you" and he goes "yeah yeah you always fix it for me" like he was picked on at school and I sorted it out like with the teachers and stuff. **NSCF-Mother_STF**

In two families the child was described as quite vulnerable as a result of poor health in the past, which perhaps explains some parental overprotection. For other mothers their overprotectiveness was mostly associated with their own personality, for example, described by the father as a 'control freak' or simply a general tendency to be overly attached to all their children.

VERY innate, strong sense. I could smell my children when they were born. If you blindfold, I could tell by smell which one was. I HATED anybody holding my children because they were mine. **NSCF-Mother**

In sharp contrast to the SCF, no NSCF fathers reported or were identified as showing any form of overprotection towards their adolescents.

In addition to the above common themes, there were three themes identified only in the single-child families: parental permissiveness, pushy parents and pampering parenting style.

THEME 1: Parental permissiveness

ADOLESCENT INTERVIEWS

For some OC both their mothers and fathers showed some parental permissiveness. They perceived their parents as being quite flexible and lenient with them allowing ‘a lot of chances’ while acknowledging that their parents were very caring and not neglectful:

Like, so, sometimes he like [long pause] like sometimes he...he normally lets me to do what I want...and he like...he usually like caring....if something major he like shows....expression if it's something major...

OC-Male

Another OC made an interesting comparison with one of his friends with siblings that parents of an only-child are generally more flexible in their parenting.

Let's just use [friend] as an example. His dad is quite strict cause when I was calling him once his dad came in there and he yelled at him because he hasn't fed the guinea pigs and he's got two guinea pigs and he ended the call straightaway. I heard every single word I forgot and his dad was screaming at him. If you were an only-child I think he would be a bit less...less angry at him. **OC-Male**

PARENT INTERVIEWS

While this theme was identified by very few OC, nearly half of the SCF mothers perceived themselves as being flexible and lenient with their adolescent only-child. They explained that it was not that they were permissive but rather that ‘I can be strict if I need to be but I am very very very easy-going’. These mothers

were aware of being perhaps too flexible with their young adolescent and were sometimes caught up in an internal conflict about how to find a balance between being ‘tolerant’ and ‘strict’, similar to the conflict felt about over-indulgence above. This is reflected in a quote from one of the mothers who described her parenting as ‘*mid-way to a bit too easy going to be honest*’.

In some cases, mothers felt their only child seemed to expect (or perhaps was even used to) their mother being lenient. One of the singletons reacted ‘shocked’ when the mother tried to exert her parental authority:

I think once I told her to go to her bedroom recently and she was like shocked “you can’t tell me to do that” and then I was more shocked (laughs) of her and then I’m “yes I can, I’m your parent” [...] she doesn’t understand that I’ve got that authority.

[...] so I think I set rules down but don’t stick to them. I don’t really punish her, I don’t, I sort of (short pause) rationalise in my own mind the way, you know, she’s been thinking as a teenager in a way and for an easy life sometimes I just...let her away with it too much! (laughs)

SCF-Mother

THEME 2: Pushy parents

A few SCF parents reported being somewhat ‘pushy’ with their child although this was seen as being in the best interests of the latter. They felt the need to not just guide but also get more involved for the child to really make the most of his opportunities (e.g. hobbies and interests). They aimed to influence their child’s choices based on the importance they attributed to a specific aspect of the child’s life. Again, these parents seemed to be trapped in an internal conflict whereby although they seemed very keen on providing freedom of choice to their adolescent only-child, they still found themselves trying to influence these choices. This type of parenting perhaps suggests that these parents see their only child as a reflection of their own aspired self.

M: [...] So yeah, but so we both we both learned the piano together but that’s less his interest, it’s more me pushing him to do it because I think he’ll enjoy having it. His taekwondo we don’t really get involved...

F: Yes, from time to time, sometimes he doesn't want to do it. He says "nah I don't want to go I don't want to go", and after after a time he goes when his friends; there he has no problem at all! So all depends...

SCF-Mother & Father

THEME 3: Pampering parenting style

ADOLESCENT INTERVIEWS

Half of the OC felt they were very privileged including on a materialistic level. They reported that if they did 'really want it' they often ended up having what they asked for. However, as previously mentioned they were not over-indulged since parents would often decide to do so in the form of 'gifts'. Furthermore, these OC were also pampered in terms of having and enjoying better access to various opportunities such as a good school, expensive holidays and in some cases, even their 'own bank account'.

If I really like something then my mom would say "right let me think about it". Let me give you an example. I was quite a bit naughty once I was getting a... I really liked this jacket and my mum said "okay I know you really like it but you've been naughty so you're not having it". Then I found out few weeks later for Christmas my parents had actually got it for me! So if I really like something and I try like beg them they would say yes.

OC-Female

These OC were aware of being 'spoilt' by their parents. They compared themselves to children with siblings and openly related their only-child status to being a privileged child.

[...] being an only child, I guess there's a bit more freedom. Because you know, they can buy you whatever you want, BUT not like spoiling or anything, just like if you want it or you wish for it, they can save up for it.

OC-Female

PARENT INTERVIEWS

'He's a spoilt only child I'm afraid! Feel quite embarrassed to say that to some people sometimes but he is an, he's our only child so...he is gonna get...mostly what he needs'.

The above quote is a reflection of one SCF mother who explained that they specifically 'chose' to pamper their onlie and it was in fact a deliberate mutual decision with the father to do so and '*he just gets spoiled because we wanted him*'. Across the majority of SCF, parents seemed to perceive their onlie as being pampered by them and as one who is quite 'spoilt' or 'mollycoddled'. These parents, similar to the OC, attributed this pampering to the only-child status:

I suppose when you have one child it's very easy to err get stuff. For instance, he liked he didn't know what to read and then he found because he loves reading and then he ran out of books and discovered this one book so I bought like the whole series of books!' SCF-Mother

Pampering was not only limited to the parents' roles as providers but extended to making sure that the young adolescent had an easy life. In the case of two mothers they pampered their onlie by doing most of the chores themselves rather than putting pressure on the child.

Sometimes at the moment she's a bit lazy...doesn't pick anything up...but then of course....I've always been there to do that...I've gotta stop... SCF-Mother

Moreover, according to some mothers, the child's father 'spoiled' the latter a lot more than they did:

[...] when he just takes her around he spoils her and that's... (short pause), we have a bit of a (laughs) a word about that cause I'll say to her all week "No no no, you can't take this" and then he'll take her on his own, she'll get it. SCF-Mother

Although more than half of the SCF mothers were aware that they 'do give in a bit more than other parents' this was also perceived to be a 'difficult one' to deal with when parents have only one child. They tried to rationalise their

pampering parenting because most of the time it was ‘OK’ since they did not have other children to ‘spoil’.

M: I don't think we spoil him but I think he... there's not a lot of, if there's not a good reason to say no, we don't just say no if that makes sense...[...] and because it's just one child, it's not like you have to buy say five of them and therefore becomes too expensive.

F: Yeah for the small things for me for small things it can be okay to have [...] **SCF-Mother & Father**

One SCF mother noted a feeling of helplessness that despite her only-child growing up being ‘spoilt’, she and the father were not able to step in and have more control: ‘*that carries on and so and then once he grows up now you can't really take that back!*’.

8.2 WHAT DO PARENT-ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIPS LOOK LIKE?

This research question sheds light on the nature of the parent-adolescent relationship in SCF and NSCF from the perspective of the young adolescents as well as their parents. Three themes common to both groups were identified which were: adolescent perceptions of a positive relationship (sub-theme: identification with parents), perceptions of a close relationship (sub-themes: mother-adolescent bonding in SCF and physical affection) and parental support (sub-themes: being present for the child and emotional support).

THEME 1: Adolescent perceptions of a positive relationship

Regardless of family type, adolescents mostly experienced a positive relationship with their mother as well as their father. In almost all SCF adolescents related positively to both parents and described their relationship as one which is ‘nice’, ‘really good’, ‘cool’ and overall ‘enjoyable’. In particular, for about half of these OC the relationship with their mother was one which brought special happiness to the child.

Pleasant (laughs) yeah. I enjoy living with my mum yeah [...] I'd probably be happy if I lived with my mom. **OC-Male**

It's nice it's just like it's just us yeah it's just us [...] yeah I think it's good because I feel like because it's just us we kind of like a team we just are together. **OC-Female**

In two thirds of the SCF adolescents felt the relationship was one of mutual caring. Nonetheless the positive nature of this relationship characterised the mother-adolescent relationship more than the father-adolescent relationship in single-child families.

[...] like if she was really happy about something but for some reason I was I wasn't feeling that well I didn't really be that happy about it then I guess I wouldn't tell her that I was sad about it and let her enjoy what's going on [...] **OC-Female**

He doesn't like seeing me upset. **OC-Female**

Similarly, in all the NSCF the adolescents experienced a positive relationship with both their parents - '*We get on well most of the time*'. This relationship was explicitly described as one that is 'nice' and 'really good'. Interestingly, there was less distinction between mothers and fathers in NSCF than in SCF.

He's very nice, helpful... (long pause) I just, he really likes me and I really like him. **NOC-Male**

Identification with parents

This sub-theme characterised almost all of the OC who identified with both their parents positively - '*I would like to be exactly like them*'. They aspired to model themselves on their parents on two specific levels: as a parent and as a person. With regards to viewing their parents as a model for when they themselves would become parents these OC mostly related to modelling the same parenting style and type of relationship they shared with their parents. In general they seemed to consider their parents as a 'good parent'.

I would love MYSELF to BE like her, as a mum. She's really like – she's very comfortable to talk to. **OC-Female**

She...she is a good parent....she's a caring parent...and she's a loving parent....I wanna be like her as a parent. OC-Male

Likewise they identified with both their parents as people, mostly in terms of their personality and professional achievements.

I would do something and she would be like "oh I would do that!" and my dad will be like "oh that's what your mum does!" [...] She's really clever she's got a really good job and she's like really confident so I think that would be like really good qualities to have. OC-Female

I would like to be like him because he is more carefree he doesn't... stress too much. The little things a bit of fun [...] Yeah he's like strong... strong... Like he would just do it no matter how hard it is. OC-Female

Similarly, almost all the NOC also displayed a positive identification with both their parents as people as well as parents.

Well as they're my parents they're like my mentors sort of...So, I look up to them NOC-Male

Erm...my Dad always helps me so I wanna help everyone too when I'm older and as a parent. If I say "Dad I'm stuck on this", he says "OK I'll just finish this and come straight over", so I wanna be like him, happy to help my children at any moment but like firm so they learn what to do in a situation. NOC-Female

Identification with parents was strongly influenced by parent gender. Adolescents in both groups identified better with and shared a better connection with their same-gender parent. They related to each parent differentially based on gender.

Sometimes he has like a different opinion to my mum and I think my view is normally more similar to my mum's view than my dad's view but I don't know. OC-Female

Like, for my mum, it might be like, "so and so did that", but with my dad, it might more be like "have you watched this programme? What did you think about it?" Like more kind of scientific stuff I tend to talk to him

about [...] which is what I am used to talking him about with.

NOC-Female

THEME 2: Perceptions of a close relationship

ADOLESCENT INTERVIEWS

In both family types, the young adolescents felt close to their parents. However, like identification, closeness seemed to be moderated by parent gender.

Whilst only a few OC felt close to their father, all the OC, without any exception, reported sharing a ‘really really close’ relationship with their mother - ‘*I would miss her quite a bit because she is always there*’. This closeness mostly translated to having ‘fun time’ with their mother, relating to their mother as a ‘friend’ and spending time with her as a playmate. This close mother-single child relationship reflected some level of openness whereby the OC were very comfortable sharing ‘stuff’ in their daily life with their mother.

[...] if it's a thing that really matters like me changing schools and all of that, she's obviously like a parental figure, but like when I'm talking about my school life and stuff I enjoy she like, like it's as good as talking to someone my age most of the time. So I think that's a really great because I think we're a lot closer than a lot of people are with their parents so I feel more comfortable sharing stuff that's going on with my life so.

OC-Female

For these adolescents, their mother occupies a very important part of their life, with one describing her as ‘a person I can really trust’.

[...] I'm REALLY happy about that so I think me and my mum are really really close cause I can like share anything to her, and she shares a lot of stuff to me. **OC-Female**

When she is like upset about anything she comes and tells me. **OC-Male**

Closeness with the father was perceived by some OC as ‘similar to my mum’ but the majority were more comfortable approaching, talking and sharing ‘things’ with their mother than father.

'Nowhere close to how I am with my mum' **OC-Male**

Because I think she is more commonly there to talk to so... She can understand... and I think I am more close to my mum. **OC-Male**

One OC associated this closeness with her mother, which is more than with her father, specifically to her status as an only-child.

I love being an only child because of my mum, definitely because me and my mum are like, more closer than me and my dad.

OC-Female (step-father)

Most if not all of the NOC also felt very close to their mother as well as their father. Interestingly these adolescents seemed to be much closer to their father than the OC, reflecting more of a balance in their relationship with both parents.

Many of the NOC felt 'very close' to their mother. This close relationship was characterised by the mother being present for the young adolescent who clearly felt very comfortable to approach her if they felt the need to.

I'm very close to my mum, like if I'm upset she'll comfort me. I've got tests this week, so I'm really stressed out, she's been like helping me, telling me I'll be fine and everything. **NOC-Female**

I feel really close like if I was being bullied I would tell her. **NOC-Male**

The majority of the NOC also reported a very close relationship with their father but they did not explicitly elaborate on the dimensions of this closeness like with their mother. They described it in terms of 'getting on really well' with their father like 'having a lot of fun together' along with the father often viewed as a very 'funny' person who likes to crack 'jokes' and make them laugh. For some, their father was also their playmate.

I feel really close to him. I have only known him for about six or five years but we get on really well together [...] I think that it's similar to my mum.

NOC-Male (step-father)

Some of the NOC felt closer to their mother than their father for very similar reasons to the OC.

We are very close. I don't tell him as much as my mum like I would feel like he doesn't understand it as much but I love him the same just sometimes I feel more comfortable telling my mum things than him because we're both girls and he is a boy and it can sometimes get a bit awkward. **NOC-Female**

Therefore regardless of whether the child was a singleton or one with sibling/s, and regardless of child gender, many of the young adolescents felt closer to their mother than their father including their step-father.

PARENT INTERVIEWS

Although it was clear that all parents shared some closeness with their young adolescent, there was still a marked difference in the nature and prevalence of parent-adolescent closeness between the two groups.

'Very very close and we are like best mates'

Almost all the SCF mothers reported a 'VERY VERY close' relationship with their adolescent singleton. This closeness was perceived in terms of friendship; spending a lot of time together; openness especially the child towards the mother; trust; affection; sharing; some permissiveness on behalf of the mother leading to 'negotiating' and, consideration for each other's feelings:

It's really really really very close. We have a very close relationship as I said. In a way she is kind of like my best friend and we get on really really well [...] It's not like having no boundaries but within those boundaries you know to have some kind of freedom to choose so... [...] **SCF-Mother**

As I said she is very open...And I do trust her implicitly because there was a first incident with a boy recently. She liked a boy and they were texting but she told me everything she even showed me the texts without me asking so I do completely trust her [...] **SCF-Mother_SP**

Very close. Very very close. He is my life really. So yeah really really close [...] He listens to me [child] he doesn't listen to anybody else. SCF-Mother_STF

Only in a few SCF was an explicit reference made to the father also sharing a very close relationship with the adolescent only-child. This was mostly reflected in spending time together, being affectionate and communicating with each other regularly.

M: I think we are quite close as a family actually.

F: I do.

M: I told you about her school trip to Austria. She phoned us and communicated with us every single day. When she left she made sure that she gave us both the keys when she left. One of her very close friends was here and she was not leaving before saying goodbye to her daddy oh no [child] made sure she did that. I think we have a close family bond.

SCF-Mother & Father

In three families, two of which were step-father families, the child was explicitly perceived by the parents to be closer to the mother than the father.

Not as close as it is with me. He is a little bit distant from him. My husband has 3 kids from his first marriage and my husband puts most of his energy into those 3 kids. SCF-Mother_STF

In general for most NSCF families, parents' relationship with their adolescent was good, stable and fairly close, although a few mothers acknowledged a closer parent-adolescent relationship similar to the SCF mothers.

I wouldn't say it's incredibly close. It's not like... I think we get along all right. I resolve conflicts with her. There is probably no conflicts [...] I would say our relationship is GOOD but I wouldn't say it's close.

NSCF-Father

Erm, but, but I think we're I think we're quite close on a lot of levels. I think. NSCF-Mother

Um pretty close yeah. Um I feel pretty close. I feel kinda, you know, I walked him this afternoon and he came, he came and gave me a massive great hug and a cuddle [...] So, uh, I think we are quite close... **NSCF-Mother**

This fairly close relationship reflected independence on behalf of the young adolescent as well as less connection and involvement with parents on a one-to-one level than seen in only children. Some parents deliberately established boundaries in their relationship with their adolescent whereby they separated their role as a parent from being a friend. They primarily enforced their status as a parent figure with an emphasis on exerting parental authority more than friendship.

But on the other hand I believe that when you get too comfortable with each other the line between us can become blurred [...] There is a space there is a time for me to be her friend her best friend and there is a time for me to be her parent. **NSCF-Father**

You know, we've got a really strong relationship, but I'm not, we're not necessarily his best friend [...] I mean the thing about being a, I'm [child's] dad, I'm not his best friend. **NSCF-Father**

I am a mother and not her friend that would be how I look at it. We are close we have a laugh that sort of thing but I think I have more of an authority kind of sensible approach to things. **NSCF-Mother**

Similar to the SCF, some parents in the NSCF thought their adolescent felt closer to the mother than the father:

F: I think she is close to both of us probably slightly more I would say like when you go when you go and get your nails done while me and [child's brother] go up and do stuff.

M: yeah we do have our girl time when we go and do some girly things, just hang out yeah we do do that. **NSCF-Mother & Father**

Two more specific aspects of parent-child closeness were identified as sub-themes:

1. Mother-adolescent bonding

Although adolescents in both groups perceived a very close relationship with their mother, there was a unique type of closeness experienced only by the OC; a strong mother-child bond reflecting a strong emotional attachment between the OC and their mother, as reported by both mothers and children.

ADOLESCENT INTERVIEWS

Almost half of female OC and a few male OC formed a strong emotional ‘bond’ with their mother; they were more than just close to each other and the mother was more than just a parent in their eyes. Their relationship was deeply founded in love and care and they were very attached to one another as illustrated below:

[...] I’ll actually do ANYTHING for her. If people are being rude to her, I tell them and then, if they are – I love her more than I think, so kind of. It depends what they do so, if they do something, I just tell them or – yeah, I’m very protective of her, yeah, very protective [...] Very close, yeah.

OC-Female

I always hug her I give her kisses and I am always kind to her. I show her what I think and ensure I had say yes or no and we will always be together. **OC-Female**

Of note, one OC related this bond to being an only-child.

[...] If like a person has, just speaking aloud here, 10 kids and then one of them dies, she will be sad for like 10 days or something like that and then she will just like forget about it because she still has nine. But if I die my mum will freak out and... Yeah. **OC-Male**

In contrast, most of the NOC perceived a very similar and undifferentiated relationship with both parents and related any differences in terms of their parents just being ‘different people’ personality-wise:

I think I have different experiences with both of them cause they are different people but I think if you restrict it to the very basics it is very similar. **NOC-Female**

They both are like “I hope you are ok” and stuff like that and they both tell me like something I can do to help it so like if there’s a problem they treat it the same way really. Very similar, they both give me loads of hugs, I don’t have to ask them to give me a hug... so they’re very similar.

NOC-Female

One NOC made a direct comparison with her friend who is an only-child reinforcing the notion that only-children differentiate between their parents with a ‘stronger relationship’ with the mother.

Well I think she’s got...she has a stronger relationship with her mum than her dad, I know that. Erm...and then I’m kind of like on both sides with my mum and my dad... [...] Then erm she’s got a bit of a stronger relationship with her mum than I do with my mum. **NOC-Female**

PARENT INTERVIEWS

‘Very strong bond and I love him to bits’

In almost all the SCF, mothers but not fathers also identified this strong parent-adolescent bond. It was described and experienced in different ways such as: ‘mummy’s boy’, ‘we are like best mates’, ‘we are quite tight’, ‘it’s not really like mother and daughter really’, ‘she is kind of like my best friend’, ‘if he is upset I’m upset’, ‘we have intuition for each other’, and a mother who ‘can read her like a book’. These quotes indicate the depth of the mother-adolescent only-child relationship in terms of closeness, love, care and strong attachment, as seen by both mothers and children.

Sometimes I think that maybe I do worry her a bit because I do sense sometimes that “oh mummy hasn’t got enough money” (laughs). She would always say to me and “you can have my money if you like...” (laughs). **SCF-Mother_SP**

But, I as a mother could know that she was maybe a little nervous. Only I can make out. But nobody else can actually make out if she's nervous or what emotion she going through. SCF-Mother_STF

Uhm, sometimes I'd like she wasn't too attached so that I feel more comfortable then with her going off... SCF-Mother

I think she lied to me once and that has been really really painful. It took me a long time to really understand why she did that... obviously for good reasons but I really felt betrayed. SCF-Mother

Two of the mothers followed the example of the OC above by making a direct link between this strong mother-child bond and the adolescent's status as an only-child.

We are very close; a lot closer than her friends seem to be with their parents. I think it's probably because it's just the two of us so we've got a very strong bond. SCF-Mother_SP

We've become very very close. We always were for being a single child. SCF-Mother_SP

2. Physical affection

ADOLESCENT INTERVIEWS

The parent-adolescent relationship involved a lot of affection in both family types. For most of the OC, affection on a physical level was commonly shared with their mothers but much less so with fathers, for example, 'cuddling', 'hugging', and through 'kisses' on a regular basis.

He gives me hugs and sort of the same things as my mum. OC-Female

No not really. We have hugs a few times but yeah that's about it.

OC-Male

I mean he kind of pats my shoulder and all of that so... OC-Female

The majority of the NOC (males and females) also reported sharing physical affection with their mother.

We always hug each other all the time. I love hugs. We always sit together and we cuddle. **NOC-Female**

With regards to fathers, more than half of the NOC across both genders stated that they also shared physical affection with their father. Again, these adolescents compared their fathers with their mothers and reported that it was often ‘about the same’ as the mother or perhaps ‘a bit less’. Therefore, both OC and NOC showed lots of affection with mothers, somewhat less with fathers, and this is particularly the case for OC.

PARENT INTERVIEWS

In both groups parents reported that physical affection was shared between parents and their young adolescent but this was also influenced by parent gender.

The majority of the SCF mothers acknowledged being ‘affectionate’ towards their adolescent with ‘lots of cuddles’, ‘kisses’, ‘hugs’ and ‘snuggles’.

Lots and lots of cuddles, and you know I really do try and consciously think, because work is quite full on for both of us, you have to come home and sometimes it’s easy to... you know still sit here you have to just put it down and say NO it’s time for cuddles. **SCF-Mother**

Physical affection between mothers and their adolescent was definitely present although less common in the NSCF. Less than half of the mothers reported being very physically affectionate with their teenager in the same ways as mothers with an adolescent singleton.

Yeah a lot of that. We are quite cuddly as a family and quite disinhibited as a family so there is no there is no... We are not shy with each other and we are... And there is constant there is fairly constant cuddle with her [...] **NSCF-Mother**

Only a few SCF fathers reported sharing physical affection with their daughter or son in ways similar to the mother. For the majority of the SCF fathers, physical affection was not commonly shared with the child (daughters and sons).

I'll put my arm sort of around her to make sure she's okay, and obviously when she's feeling sad then, then, it's lots, lots and LOTS of cuddles. Every, every night before bed, it'll be cuddles on the sofa...

SCF-Father_STF

Physical affection between fathers and their adolescent with siblings was not identified as a theme across any NSCF. In the eyes of two specific fathers, child gender had an effect on their perceptions of sharing physical affection with their child, as did the status of the child as a growing teenager.

[...] with their mum they are still close but if I'm sitting they can come and sit on me and say all hello how are you... Things like that and they can be like be physical like punching and punch my face like say stuff like "oh you are fat you know you've put on so much weight!" And all these things but you can see that this is changing. Mums can be affectionate but you can't be with boys. NSCF-Father

THEME 3: Parental support

Parental support comprising two sub-themes of being present for the child and providing emotional support was identified in both family types. Maternal and paternal support were each considered.

ADOLESCENT INTERVIEWS

Being present for the child

Almost all the OC perceived a very high level of support from their mother on various levels. Their mother was highly 'encouraging' and accompanied them in all walks of life whenever they felt the need to have someone to rely on for 'support'. They felt reassured knowing that their mother was always there to help them. In particular, for some OC, their mother was highly engaged in problem solving behaviours.

I would go straight home like I would probably call my mum the minute I'm outside like we're not allowed cell phones in my school, so the minute I would get outside my school I would call my mum. And like if she didn't pick up I would go home and wait for her to come home. Then I would

definitely tell her about it, and then I guess it's like I guess she doesn't, like her way of help like helping me cope with like negative situations is like actively like find for a solution. [...] That's why I that's why I always go to her because she always helps me, like it's like constructive so it's not like, she always tries to help me even if it's... yeah. **OC-Female**

Some but fewer of the NOC similarly felt that their mother was very supportive and encouraging illustrated by these words: *'she'll encourage me and help me', 'give me advice on it', 'she's trying to make sure that I can do that', and 'she's always there for me mainly'.*

Although less than for mothers, nearly half of the OC benefited from a high level of support from their father through encouragement in their everyday life including pursuing their hobbies and interests. Fathers often supported them by just 'being there' or they would 'encourage me to do a lot more things'. As one OC stated:

He says the same. He says uh, yeah. Um, whatever you have the chance to do, just do it, otherwise you'll regret it. **OC-Female**

Likewise, nearly half of the NOC felt that their father was very supportive towards them. Very often this level of support was also compared to that of the mother and perceived to be similar whereas the OC reported more support from mothers than fathers.

My mum will be like "you were amazing at that!" and my dad will be like "I can just picture you on X-Factor like you said!" **NOC-Female**

PARENT INTERVIEWS

In both groups parents reported that they were very supportive of their young adolescent.

Across all the SCF both mothers and fathers provided considerable support in diverse ways to their young adolescent. For example, they acted as a facilitator to ensure that the child had access to anything that they might need to undertake a particular activity.

Hmmm we pay for it! Dancing is quite a commitment in terms of facilitating her being part of that group so she goes on Thursdays she goes every Saturday and participates in things as well as that [...] again it's about taking her and facilitating all of that. We support her by attending the charity dance events that her school produces. We also support her when she plays sports. We don't watch her all the time. SCF-Mother

The majority of mothers engaged in different problem-solving behaviours to help their onlie and were very active in seeking help from outside if needed:

So I, as a parent I reassured her but I did go and tell the teacher [...] so now I'm very careful and I say "do you want me to speak to the teacher?" or I'll say "I know you don't want me to but I'm going to". And I told her, I recently had to speak to the school, she told me the other day "I didn't know you would send a letter" I said, "I did tell you, I am telling you now" so I'm very open and honest if there's a problem. I'll talk to her but I'll ask "do you want me to?" if it's trivial and if it isn't I'll leave it but if I think it's necessary I'll tell her that I've got to. SCF-Mother

Similarly, NSCF parents were very supportive of their young adolescent. They perceived their role as a facilitator and provided a lot of support in terms of encouraging them to pursue their hobbies and interests.

M: Well we just support every...if she's interested in a book we will buy it immediately. If she wants to do some drawing and there's some special pens we will buy them immediately. If she wants to learn an instrument we say YES please do it or say no now because she's tried it two or three times and she's dropped it. Ok, it's probably not quite her thing.

F: We, we, we ask her quite seriously and in other ways, have a few tests as well... going out and buying the music thing!

M: I mean we, we're just trying to support every interest really and...facilitate... NSCF-Mother & Father

Many of these parents (including fathers) were also active in seeking extra help to support their child and to try and solve any issues. However, in

comparison to the SCF these parents intervened considerably less. They wait for the child to initiate before they take action:

F: [...] she was going on a school trip for almost a week and she was starting to get really worried then we actually got some form of professional help from someone else outside.

M: but it's always her initiative... Like we always ask her "do you want us to go and see someone? Shall we try this? Shall we do that?" If she says no then we kind of back off.

F: yeah we suggest things and we don't really force things on her [...]

NSCF-Mother & Father

Emotional support

ADOLESCENT INTERVIEWS

The majority of the OC stated that they very often, if not always, approached their mother for emotional support. Some were comfortable to seek emotional support from their mother about 'anything' and 'everything' while others would only approach their mother about specific matters. Most were happy to share both positive and negative feelings with their mother. Several reasons were provided such as the mother was perceived to be very 'understanding', or there was also the element of 'trust' in their relationship whereby the adolescent felt 'safe' to approach the mother. For these adolescents, it was an intuitive response that they went straight to their mother.

I tell her everything [...] Yeah, cause if I'm worried about anything, I can't keep it inside of me, I'd always have to tell her [...] **OC-Female**

Furthermore nearly half of the OC explained that very often the mother would approach them to provide emotional support if she was 'a bit worried' about them or felt that they were perhaps 'upset'.

If they just think I don't look right because I am always happy, making people laugh, dancing and stuff. If they know that I am not looking like this they would say to me "Are you all right?" And I would be like "yeah yeah

I am fine". But if they really think that I am not all right they would want me to talk to them and they say to me quite often "promise you will tell me this and this cause I would be there for you" and I know that they will and I tell them. OC-Female

As seen in the above quote the father also proactively offered the child emotional support. For several of the OC, fathers were emotionally available for their child.

Um, uh... he says if I ever need to talk about anything that's troubling me or just I need to get it out, he just says, come to me...and I can talk to you. He won't judge me or whatever. Same as my mum though. Um, yeah. He's just always there making sure I'm okay. If I feel down about anything, I can talk to him. OC-Female

However, for more than half of the OC emotional support was mostly sought from their mother. Child gender also played an important role; daughters felt more at ease approaching their mother than their father about specific matters where she would be better able to understand.

Uh, I'd say that I would go to my mum more about feelings [...] than my dad, yeah [...] Just feel more, like comfortable to talk about feelings, cause I'm a girl and she's a girl so it's easier depending on what it is. So, uh, yeah, so uh, I feel more comfortable talking to her about certain things. OC-Female

The majority of the NOC also stated that they approached their mother for emotional support if they felt 'upset', needed 'help' and in general, similar to the OC, they were able to 'share pretty much anything with her':

She always asks me if I had a good day at school, and if I'm like upset she'll always give me a hug and ask what's wrong, makes me feel better by talking to me and giving me like attention. NOC-Female

Slightly more than half of the NOC were equally comfortable seeking emotional support from their father although most of the time it was about 'I just tell them both' rather than choosing the father over the mother. Several NOC also

stated that their father was also comfortable approaching them to: '*cheer me up by having a joke*' if they looked upset or simply if they '*had a bad day*'.

I think my mum asks me about my feelings more often but I also think that my dad does ask if I am seeming sad or something. He probably knows already but he will ask me anyway! **NOC-Female**

Regardless of the number of children, parent gender strongly influenced the adolescents' tendency to approach a specific parent for emotional support with more NOC showing a clear preference for their mother. These adolescents, regardless of their gender '*go to mum more*' whenever they felt the need to share something emotional.

Yes, all the time. It's my mum, not normally my dad [...] I just feel like I've got more of an emotional connection with my mum, than dad. **NOC-Male**

PARENT INTERVIEWS

Parents in both types of families were very sensitive about the emotional well-being of their young adolescent and hence would 'approach' the child to offer emotional support.

In the SCF whilst the majority of the mothers reported approaching their child to provide emotional support, this proactive parental support was only identified amongst a few fathers. Some mothers reported that they '*can usually tell*' when their child is upset about anything and their instant reaction would often be to try and '*talk it out*'. As such, these parents attached a lot of importance to being present on an emotional level.

Yeah, if she's upset and that's whether she's upset on the phone, and I can just hear it in her voice or the way she's speaking or in person, yeah. It's always, always me going to her, to be honest...I think she'd be very quick to come to me anyway [...] You know, we're, we're not the sort of family where...we just sit in silence over it. Yeah, we want to deal with it.

SCF-Father_STF

Several mothers stated that their young only-child adolescent easily approached them for emotional support. These adolescents relied considerably on

their mother in this regard and it was almost an instant reaction to seek their mother for emotional support. Some mothers encouraged their young adolescent to approach them; in the words of one: *'I tell her always a problem shared is a problem halved'*. Another mother said:

Yeah, usually she just comes straight to me, even before I can ask. Even before I know there is a problem, she'll come to me. But if I see that she's a little dull or something...but which is very rare, I ask "is everything OK...?" yeah... she actually immediately talks about it and I listen and give her whatever advice I can. SCF-Mother_STF

Interestingly, three mothers of OC (across different family structures) not only provided emotional support to their adolescent but also sought emotional support from their adolescent when they themselves felt upset.

Yeah it's always two ways as I said but of course I try not to... Certain things I don't really want to burden her because you know she is a teenager she is a kid so you know if I have some relationship issues of course I really try not to discuss them but it happens sometimes so it's sort of like... Yeah. SCF-Mother

Child gender did not influence this aspect of the parent-adolescent relationship in the SCF. However, some fathers including a step-father felt that their adolescent mostly sought their mother rather than them for emotional support.

I think when he's upset he's going more to his mother than me I think, but if he's upset I try to talk with him and err to try to give not my experience but try to give some "pour et contre"? [French words] SCF-Father

More than half of the NSCF mothers reported approaching their young adolescent to provide emotional support in the same ways as the mothers of an only-child although less often. They also talked to the child, reassured them when they were upset, tried to find solutions to their problems, and overall seemed to be present on this level. However, most of them came across as less overly-concerned about their child than mothers in the SCF.

If I notice that she is upset then yeah I will do. If she seems to be a little bit quiet or something then I will ask her “what’s going on?” She will usually let me know in her own time. Sometimes she really needs some time to just think about it. NSCF-Mother

Moreover, it was more often the adolescent approaching them for emotional support rather than mothers offering it first.

But if there’s something I want to talk to her about, not anything to do with her, but something else, then then I will bring it up. If I’m in the car with her or something then I’ll bring it up, but but I think if SHE’S troubled with something I think she will bring it to me. NSCF-Mother

Child gender was again not a determining factor influencing parental emotional support in the NSCF but parent gender did moderate this aspect. Both parents felt that their young adolescent was more likely to approach the mother than the father for emotional support. Furthermore a few fathers also reported that they were themselves less likely than the mother to approach their adolescent to offer support.

F: Well if I sense she you know she’s not happy about something or you know I’ll talk to her. Erm... rare when that happens or if (Mum) mentioned something to me then I’ll try talk to her and if her mum says “please talk to her” or “don’t talk to her in this situation” so...

M: I don’t think she’d come to you first.

F: She wouldn’t come to me, no... [...] NSCF-Mother & Father

8.3 WHAT IS IT LIKE SPECIFICALLY TO BE IN A SINGLE OR MULTIPLE CHILD FAMILY AT ADOLESCENCE?

This research question revolves around the adolescents’ experience of living with or without siblings as well as the parents’ experience of living as a SCF or a NSCF. Three main themes relevant to both types of families were identified: adolescent perception of differences as an only-child or a child with

sibling/s; feeling 'happy' as an only-child or a child with sibling/s; and, parental perceptions of differences as a SCF or a NSCF.

THEME 1: Adolescent perception of differences as an only-child or a child with sibling/s

Living as an only-child (OC) or living with sibling/s (NOC) in early adolescence were both described as experiences characterised by advantages as well as disadvantages, thus creating sub-themes of positive and negative differences.

Positive differences

In the context of the SCF, positive differences related to the child living as a singleton as well as their relationship with their parents as their one and only child. The majority of the OC were very open about their positive attitude in relation to their status as an only-child as being equivalent to '*I don't have to share ANYTHING with anyone else so that's great!*'. They enjoyed not having to share their 'space', 'room', 'things', and 'toys'. These young adolescents seemed to display a strong sense of self-centredness since being in a position where there is no need for them to share is felt as one of the main benefits of not having any sibling.

[...] people...like...are very moany about have to share with their brothers and everything whereas I don't have to share so it's easier to just like go around things by myself because if I had to like share more things, I would probably find it harder cause I would probably be more stressed cause I don't have my own space, my own bedroom [...]. **OC-Male**

[...] Like almost all my friends have brothers and sisters and they say that they have to share a lot of things! (Laughs) and it sounds I know like selfish but I'm not sure I could cope with that for a long period of time.

OC-Male

Two OC pointed out that as an only-child they were more privileged than if they had sibling/s.

You also get better privileges I would say than if you have a brother or sister. Your privileges would get halved so... Yeah. **OC-Male**

Two other OC stated that importantly, they did not have ‘to share their mum’. This tied in with their experience of having a relatively stronger bond with their mother.

So I feel like me and my mum talk a lot more than they do! Or like have a bit more like a, bond-bond... [...] Uhm, and they won't have a lot more bond with their parents. So for me, I love my bond with my parents...

OC-Female

A few OC compared their relationship with their parents to their friends’ who have siblings, with one suggesting a better parent-child relationship as a one-child family:

I don't think that they have as good of the relationship with their parents as I do as an only child. **OC-Female**

These OC perceived a better relationship with their parents as an only-child on various levels. For instance, showing more ‘respect’ towards their mother as well as engaging in better social interaction and communication with their parents than the NOC. In addition, more than half of the OC perceived themselves as closer to their parents, especially their mother, than NOC. One adolescent explained that if he had siblings, he and his dad would have been ‘more far apart’. Other examples include:

I think it's nice to be an only child I think I am closer to my parents and I think sometimes when you see families who do have siblings they fall out a lot and I don't really have that [...] OC-Female

Being an only-child meant they benefited from more attention from their parents. For example, their parents were more available to satisfy both their needs and wants, they could ‘focus more’ on them, ensured that they were always ‘protected’, invest in them and, simply be there for them as they remain the ‘centre of attention’.

[...] so it's good for them to like, focus on me, as the only child so if there's problems, they can, they mainly look at me, cause I'm the only one and all their brain is just 100% on me. OC-Female

Yeah I do like this because it means that I get some attention I mean a lot of attention! OC-Male

Three of these OC felt very 'special' in the eyes of their parents given their only-child status.

[...] sometimes is quite nice to be an only child because I think you feel more loved almost. I think you are more special because you are their only child so they want to make like extra efforts for you instead of having to make extra efforts for each child they had it would be less. OC-Female

More than half of the OC thought that they spent much more time with their parents especially their mother. Having siblings was viewed as a factor that could negatively affect the amount of time they and their parents would have together as they would also have had siblings to spend time with.

The time that their parents spend with them and their siblings is almost divided whereas me, she spends all of her time with me. OC-Male

[...] If you had like a brother or sister you would always be playing with them upstairs and like with social media and stuff you would be on there with them and stuff like that. I do have social media but I always sit with my parents and look at it because I am an only child I have nothing else to do unless I am playing with them on my own. OC-Female

Despite the perceptions of the OC, the majority of the NOC experienced positive aspects of living with siblings. They felt the importance of having a sibling in that it contributes to a better life. Many NOC reported a 'good' relationship with their sibling/s, some a 'close' relationship with their sibling/s, and others seemed to spend a lot of time with their sibling/s. Furthermore, for some there was very good sibling communication where they could easily approach their sibling to talk about 'everything'.

We're really close and I love having siblings, cause my sister like she's kinda like my best friend...I'm close to my brother as well, but there's like a real bond we have. They are both older than me and my brother is a lot older than me so he's really protective. I tell him everything [...] They listen to me together and we play together on the WI and stuff.

NOC-Female

Having a sibling was mainly conceptualised as having somebody to 'play with' and for 'company'. Thus, these NOC emphasised experiencing less loneliness as a result of having sibling/s.

I mean although I don't play with him TOO much, there are some stuff which we like to play [...] so, I would have been really bored if I were an only child and errm NOW, then I'm not that bored, cause I have like someone else there, but then before like I remember like, I'd go to my mum or my dad and I'd say like "oh come play!" and then they don't have time, so I just had to go and do my own stuff. **NOC-Female**

I think it's better to have a brother because... So I won't be alone. I do have my mum and dad but I would have liked to have someone that I could play with like outside, on the streets that I really know. **NOC-Male**

Negative differences

The loneliness factor was also highlighted by the OC, who saw it as one of the main disadvantages of the absence of a sibling. The majority reported feeling lonely very often and missed having a sibling for company. However, they seemed to be rather active in finding ways and means to cope with this loneliness (e.g. by having friends) or rationalising the fact that having no siblings can actually be better.

I feel like I am similar to them [friends with siblings]. I just don't have any siblings. They have the same interests as me but they just have someone else in the house that they talk to but then... The relationship is not always that good for them so it's not always good to have another sibling [...] because you have arguments with them and you don't really want to have

an argument. It's just I would not want to have an argument with anyone.

OC-Female

*Sometimes it can be a bit like... Say on holiday we've had to bring like friends with us because like if you go on holiday and your parents don't want to do something and you would want to go say you want to go to waterpark and your parents are like "oh we don't want to do that" or if you do go to waterpark it's like persuading them to come on instead of just saying to your brother or sister... **OC-Female***

Nevertheless for some, loneliness was quite emotional and painful. Although they tried to cope with it by accepting their situation it was clear that as a young adolescent who aspires for more social interactions, it could be quite difficult.

*[...] with a brother or sister you just get like a best friend for life because the brother or sister they would never leave you because they are family... [Child gets emotional and nearly in tears] **OC-Female***

A bit quiet but I am getting used to it... If there was another person I would feel happy but it's just a bit quiet to...hmmm....to do anything [...]it's probably a bit louder to them but it's probably a bit quieter to me.

OC-Female

By contrast, for a few adolescents, being alone was embraced and viewed mostly in a positive light. They seemed to really value their 'own time' and 'own space' in the absence of a sibling. One of them explicitly stated:

*I get to be alone as much as I want to be! **OC-Female***

The majority of the adolescents with siblings revealed some downsides living with sibling/s. These were mostly in terms of their relationship with their sibling/s and their responsibility towards any younger sibling/s. A few NOC stated that as the eldest child they were expected to look after their younger sibling/s when their parents were not around.

When they are not home I have to prevent my brother from killing himself! (Laughs). It's not that he would kill himself! But no I don't think so.

NOC-Female

Some explained that having sibling/s also involved sibling rivalry and fighting for the attention of their parents. This ties in with the OC reporting that they get their parents' full attention.

But I think maybe having a sibling kind of gives you that kind of gives you that of competitive, like when you're around other people. Like, cause like if my brothers tryna be like the angel, I, would DEFINITELY try outwit him. But like (names friend) doesn't have to try and be better because she's the only person there. She doesn't have to fight for attention as much. **NOC-Female**

Interestingly, more than half of the NOC described having sibling/s as 'annoying'. Their sibling/s took a lot of their space and/or stuff, played silly pranks on them, blamed them for 'stuff', would wind them up often, would get them in trouble by complaining to the parents and would make them feel very frustrated:

Life is difficult (laughs). He's annoying [...] Erm and well I guess because cause I've spent like eight...eight or nine years of my life without him, then I'm kind of like find...at first I found it difficult, like when he was all cute and innocent then...it was alright and then now he's just annoying and taking my stuff saying "that's MINE" and then hiding it somewhere or like he has toy cars and if I like even touch one, or if one hits my foot when I'm walking, then he says "(names child) why did you do that?" And then he tries to blame me for stuff which I'm not really used to ... and I just get so ANNOYED. **NOC-Female**

She is ANNOYING! We don't really talk to each other cause she is like the total opposite of me on social terms [...] **NOC-Male**

Having regular, albeit mostly trivial, arguments with siblings was another disadvantage of being a non-only child for about half of the participants.

[...] He always like does something to annoy me and I try to ignore him and he always goes on and on and on and then he retaliates and I retaliate and I always get the blame for it cause I am the older one. And he just doesn't know when to stop. NOC-Female

THEME 2: Feeling 'happy' as an only-child or a child with sibling/s

This theme reflects the positive feelings and emotions of the young adolescents who are *without* sibling/s and also those *with* sibling/s.

Without exception the OC reported that they were generally 'happy' as a child without siblings. In fact, they spontaneously expressed this positive emotion when asked about their feelings being an only-child. They were mostly *happy* in relation to the previously mentioned positive differences, which suggests that these significantly outweigh the perceived negative differences.

Some just felt happy about being a singleton as they have never known a life with sibling/s, so they were 'used to it':

[...] all my life I have been an only child I have got used to it and I quite like it. OC-Male

Happy. Cause I get like more stuff. I don't like I don't know how it would feel to like have a brother or sister so... OC-Male

When asked to reflect on whether they would have preferred to have siblings rather than being an only-child, two-thirds showed a strong preference for their only-child status, confirming their feelings of happiness about being an only-child. They compared themselves positively to their friends with sibling/s. They were specifically happy about the followings: no sharing; more attention from parents; better privileges; more freedom; stronger bond with their parents; more closeness with their mother; more parental involvement; 'no interruptions' from and arguments with siblings; no sibling rivalry; more space and stuff of their own; and, more alone time. In a nutshell, these OC appreciated that they were much more pampered than if they had siblings. As noted by one:

I think I'm lucky because I don't have to (small laugh) go through that!

OC-Female

However, for the remaining OC the thought of not having a sibling triggered some mixed feelings. Although mostly happy about their status, they sometimes sounded a bit pensive about how life would have been with a sibling around focusing on the positive differences that a sibling would have brought to their life. These included being less lonely, having a playmate and somebody under the same roof to spend time with.

Sad but happy at the same time... **OC-Female**

I wouldn't mind nor do I WANT them! **OC-Female**

I like being on my own sometimes but occasionally I can feel lonely [...] I like sometimes being with my mum and dad together and just the three of us. Sometimes I can like want to have another sibling. **OC-Male**

Just as much as the OC were mostly happy being a child without siblings, most (although not all) of the NOC were equally happy being a child with sibling/s. Their happiness was strongly founded in all the positive differences they reported such as having a playmate, having somebody to spend time with, having a sibling to 'share everything' on an emotional level and importantly, not feeling lonely with a sibling as support.

I really like having siblings...because it just makes [long pause] everything more interesting...like I'm not...like if...we go on holiday I have my siblings to talk to...I am not on my own and stuff [...] cause I like have siblings cause like it just makes like being at home like more interesting... cause there's always like....like when you don't want to talk to parents you can always just talk to your siblings... **NOC-Female**

Strikingly, the majority of the NOC showed a strong preference for having sibling/s valuing the advantages of having a sibling much more than the aforementioned disadvantages. For many they now could not imagine life *without* their sibling/s.

*Definitely not! I love my brother too much. We just have so much fun together. I don't...Growing up especially there are lots of stuff we've done together. I don't think I could deal with being an only child. I just I couldn't not have [names brother] I don't... No. **NOC-Female***

*I'm glad I have a sister. I'm glad I'm not an only child... **NOC-Male***

The above participant also reflected on being an only-child and affirmed that he would not have appreciated being the centre of attention for his parents; in sharp contrast with the OC adolescents who enjoyed being in the limelight.

I would have two pairs of eyes watching me! Yeah both of my parents will be watching me the whole time with no distractions and I'd probably find that quite unnerving [...] Yeah, rather than all of the attention, so...

NOC-Male

Another NOC felt that being an only-child is equivalent to being very lonely.

*Oh...otherwise I'd end up like him...like spending all my time inside and I've got no one to like play with if I'm at home or anything. **NOC-Male***

THEME 3: Parental perceptions of differences as a SCF or a NSCF

Parents in the SCF experienced positive as well as negative differences living as a SCF. Some parents in the NSCF reported negative differences living as a NSCF but did not mention any positive differences.

Positive differences as a SCF

The majority of the SCF reported an array of positive differences as one-child families including the parent-adolescent relationship. Nearly half of these parents generally felt much closer to their adolescent one-child and attributed this 'very close' parent-adolescent relationship to the fact that they were a single-child family. They appreciated having an only-child as the latter was able to benefit from more attention than if they had more than one child:

I mean not having two children or three children I have only one child which means that my relationship with [child] is pretty close [...] Because you have one child you get to know that child really really well whereas if you had five children you are splitting your attention between the five. I'm not saying that you can't have a close relationship with five children but I should think that it's easier. SCF-Father

For a few of these families the parent-adolescent relationship was also characterised by a remarkable level of openness as far as parent-adolescent communication was concerned; which they attributed to their status as a one-child family and perceived to be less the case for multiple-children families. This finding is accurately reflected in this quote:

[...] it was the first time when (child) gone out with her friends from school which was last year and I said to her "you stay together, you don't go off, you don't split up, you stay with each other" [...] So it was funny because when (child), one friend suggested that three of them go that way and 3 of them go that way and (child) said "no, you can't do that" and she said "why I can't, is it because..." "Well my mum told us we can't" and she said "well, DON'T tell her", she said "I HAVE to tell her" and her friend said "why would you tell your mum everything?" and she said "yeah" and then this child said to the other child "it's because she's an ONLY CHILD". So they could, couldn't understand why my (child) was telling me everything. So that was the only thing really that struck me is that, that's the first time (child) has come out saying "they said it because I was an ONLY CHILD" (laughs). SCF-Mother

One SCF mother also expressed that they were 'quite happy as a little family of three!' In two SCF the parents felt that their adolescent only-child was keener on spending time with them than their counterparts who have siblings:

I'll go to, say on a Saturday morning, I'll ask her if she wants to go out with one of her friends...over Christmas holidays she wanted to spend all her time with ME...you know, when she's found out her friends have gone out, she said "Oh, they've gone out together now" so, "well, you chose to stay with me, I offered to take you to your friends..." SCF-Mother

Other parents in SCF showed great appreciation for their onlie. These families felt that they ‘get on really well’ with them, especially ‘being only the two of us’ in the case of single-parent one-child families. As one mother stated:

[...] So I think when you have a little one you think... we knew we appreciated her because she was our only child and therefore you kind of cherish every period of life but you know she is a teenager now you know.

SCF-Mother

Negative differences as a SCF or NSCF

Some very specific disadvantages associated with living as a SCF were identified across less than half of the families. Some parents felt that they indulged their child a lot more than if they had more than one child although they were also cautious not to over-indulge them.

[...] because she’s an only child and I look at the monetary side that if it was two of them, if it was two children we would have spent money anyway so if we don’t get the best of everything but she’s got the... (coughs), she’s got an iPad, she’s got an iPhone which, you know, when I was younger I didn’t have any of that [...] She wants the best phone now but I said she can’t have it cause we are not rich and, you know, you have to, she’s got a...her dad got her a contract which I really didn’t agree with because I’ve got a really cheap contract (laughs) [...] now she wants an even better upgrade and I’m saying no but I know her dad just said yes so we’ll have to have a discussion and now she’s not to have better stuff than us I don’t agree with it [...] **SCF-Mother**

In one single-parent family the mother felt that she and her young adolescent had more conflicts since they were just the two of them and were also quite close.

[...] I think because we are close we do argue obviously. There is only the two of us under one roof [...] **SCF-Mother_SP**

For another mother, being a SCF led the child to have a lot more say in family decision-making than anticipated resulting in 'a bit of a friction' in the family.

*Yeah...sometimes (son) offers too much of an opinion on things and I think sometimes we get him involved in decision making...we possibly shouldn't...but I think because he's an only one as well, he's got a lot of adult interaction... [...] and yeah...he'll...he's quite often around when decisions are taking place, so he will chip in...sometimes it causes a bit of a friction...because if I agree with (son) sometimes and not his dad that can cause bit of a... argument (laughs) **SCF-Mother***

Yet another mother raised concern about being too lenient with her young only-child adolescent.

*But then when there's a need we do discipline him but usually friendly that's why he's the way he is (laughs). Yeah. He's err... yeah I think... quite because an only child as well, very friendly. **SCF-Mother***

Some SCF parents had some very specific concerns about their young adolescent only-child revolving around the present life as well as the future. For example, a few parents, especially mothers, had concerns about their young adolescent only-child experiencing loneliness. One mother said she actively encouraged her child to seek support from her as her parent and to rely on her close social circle to compensate for the missing support of a sibling.

*[...] she is really close to nearly all of my friends. She is obviously really close to my mum. So I always drum into her that if there was ever anything that she didn't want to talk to me about, that she could go to any of them and obviously for me as a parent that's not an ideal situation but I would never want her to not be able to talk to someone... **SCF-Mother_SP***

For another mother it was a difficult experience to recognise that her only-child would have preferred to have a sibling. Nonetheless, she noted that compared to during childhood the young adolescent now felt less lonely.

Yeah I think for when (child) especially he's... throughout his childhood, occasionally said "oh why can't I have a brother or sister..." he's felt quite lonely...he's not mentioned that so much as he's older but I always think when he's older...and me and his dad are old...he's gonna be on his own. SCF-Mother

This reflects another concern of parents with an only-child: the risk of their child feeling very lonely in later life.

M: As a family...Sometimes (child) says "oh I will have to marry somebody who has brothers and sisters otherwise my child will not have any aunts or uncles!" Out of the whole thing that's the only thing which worries me is as she gets older and has her own family but...you know what we also have friends who are equally brought to us as a family so...

F: I wouldn't ever even when she is a bit older to be on her own...that's the only...

M: That's the only thing that worries me but other than that we are quite happy to have an only as a family. SCF-Mother & Father

One mother was particularly anxious about losing her one and only child and was wary about the future of the child if ever anything happened to her. Therefore being a SCF can underlie some form of insecurity bearing in mind that the only-child does not have siblings as a support network; especially in later life.

Probably because he is my only one. And I have got no backups. That sounds terrible but I think it's very different if you've just got the one. You just plan everything into that one [...] well I sort of think that if anything happened to me, I would know how my mum... you know if anything happened to him so yeah...[...] SCF-Mother_STF

Yet another mother was worried that her child did not have any sibling to seek comfort from if she was experiencing issues with the parents. The child is often left to deal with a lot of emotional stress from the parents with no sibling to relieve pressure.

[...] Uhm, so I've, I didn't want, I always, if I am involved in telling her off I don't want him involved in telling her off and sometimes I've stopped him for telling her OFF because I've always said there's two of us onto one child, she hasn't, she hasn't have a sibling to go off and cry and moan about parents too so I've always prevented him from, us both attacking her at once cause that's just too much for her [...] **SCF-Mother**

One mother felt that as a SCF was handicapped by not having the chance to develop her parenting skills and engage in a learning process using any past parenting experience.

The house up the road, now that may be a bit, we may need to sort of think about giving her a bit more freedom...but I think sometimes when you have only got one, everything is a bit more heightened. Because you haven't got another one to look to and learn from [...] no (laughs) it's also not a, you know, you haven't done it before so you haven't learnt anything, you know we're still learning, so I think we're quite tough on her at times. **SCF-Mother**

Some NSCF experienced disadvantages pertaining to having more than one child. For example, one father explained that his young adolescent was less open to communication with him in the presence of the sibling.

[...] Then he told me afterwards he didn't want to talk about it because [brother] was there. Fine. So I left it and I thought there's no point...then a few days later I had a conversation with him alone [...] **NSCF-Father**

For a few parents spending one-on-one time with their adolescent was difficult as they also had to give equal time to the child's sibling.

[...] if I try to play with her my little boy would be like "why are you playing with her?" and he gets involved so it's mostly whenever we try to do things it's as a family it's very rare that it will be kind of one-on-one [...] **NSCF-Father**

Having more than one child was seen as being more difficult to ‘manage’ whereas ‘with one child it was easy’. The overall experience of some of the NSCF was that having multiple children meant juggling different responsibilities including work-life balance.

In terms of the difference it makes one was easy you know as you would expect one is easy because one adult you know bear in mind at this point where we had this experience of different numbers they were all very young but with one child it was easy you can manage your child on your own and do other things. A little bit of things you can eat and sleep and do things... With two it's still okay because then you kind of have one each but then when you get to three it's harder [...] NSCF-Father

8.4 DOES BEING AN ONLY CHILD AFFECT PEER RELATIONSHIPS IN ADOLESCENCE?

This theme reflects the well-being of the early adolescents (OC and NOC) in terms of how they perceived and experienced their relationship with peers. One main theme relevant to both types of families was identified: active socialisation with friends. For the OC adolescents one sub-theme was also identified: making friends as an adolescent only-child.

THEME 1: Active socialisation with friends

Peer interactions were mainly positive for both adolescent OC and NOC.

More than half of the adolescent OC reported enjoying a positive relationship with their peers. As much as they enjoyed spending time with their parents these young adolescent onlies were also very active in making friends and spending time with them. Many reported approaching their friends for emotional support and, talking to them about typical teenage issues such as school and the opposite sex. Nonetheless, their mother still remained their main anchor for emotional support. These OC visited their friends quite often and had their friends over at their house frequently. Reflective of the early stage of adolescence, they showed signs of increased reliance on peers whilst maintaining a close

relationship with their parents. Friendship occupied a significant place in the life of the early adolescent only-children.

But the truth is like, the boys yeah, they annoy me. So I normally tell that to my friends, and my friends (snickers), in the end uhm, just like, have a small banter with them, that's what I normally talk about with my FRIENDS [...] Just some stuff – about school, and schoolwork, it's all about my friends and me [...] I don't mind saying schoolwork with my mum, but some of them, just me and my friends, that's it. OC-Female

Like I spend time with her and spend time with my friends... and spend time with my mum [...] Not like EVERYTHING I talk to my friends about other stuff not like games and stuff but I say to her about stuff as to what's going on at school and stuff so yeah [...] I speak to my friends more about happy feelings whereas negative feelings I speak to my mum. OC-Male

Similarly, the NOC showed signs of active socialisation with peers. They spent a lot of time playing and doing different activities with their friends, approaching them to share or talk about 'things', and visiting them.

[...] I have like lots of friends and be surrounded by them go out with them and go shopping and everything... [...] NOC-Female

Tell my friends about it! NOC-Female

Making friends as an adolescent only-child

Some adolescent OC commented on their peer relationships specifically as an only-child. For two of these making friends was perceived to be easier in the absence of a sibling. There were two main reasons for this: a sibling as a distraction or preoccupation and a sibling as a barrier to friendship.

Uhhh...well, I feel like, you can get more friends cause you don't have, like siblings coming and...distracting you (giggles) like cause some of my friends, when you go in their houses, they try to get in their rooms and come and join in and stuff (continues giggling) [...] I feel like...it's easy to make friends sometimes because you don't have a sibling to keep thinking about. OC-Female

[...] Because if you have a brother or a sister sometimes you really want to be with them and then if they like a girl and they want to play with you of the same age and you wanted to play with a different friend, you might not be able to do as much because they would be like “can you play out?” But they might not like your sister so it’s gonna be difficult. OC-Female

Two OC made it clear that being an only-child did not negatively affect friendship quality. That is, they did not feel excluded by their friends who had siblings.

But they’re still all like, a really close part of me. So they do treat me like I’m their sister and brother, so it’s not like, “oh I’m going to leave you out just cause you’re the only child!” [...] She accepts me for like who I am and just cause I’m like, a single child. OC-Female

Yeah I believe so because I don’t think anyone when they meet someone new they think “oh do they have a brother or a sister?” They are not any different to who they are. OC-Male

In the case of two adolescent only-children, they seemed to relate to their friends as their substitute siblings. When they felt lonely or did not have anyone to play with they automatically tried to connect with their friends. They tried to fill the void of no siblings with friendship, while also being happy about their only-child status.

It’s quite nice because you get most of the attention between your parents because there is no one else. But then you would like someone else of your age to talk to... Someone who’s got the same personality as you like your friends at school... A bit like that I feel sometimes but then you’ve got parents and you can invite friends over so it’s okay [...] It’s good because you tend to have your own space when you want to be alone but then sometimes you want to be with someone... But then you just ring one of your friends! OC-Female

8.5 WHY STOPPING AT ONE CHILD? Vs. WHY MORE THAN ONE CHILD?

All parents were asked why they had had only one child or had had more than one. Three themes were identified: choice (SCF and NSCF), negative personal experiences (SCF only) and, consideration of past relationships involving partner's children (SCF only).

THEME 1: Choice

One major theme identified in both groups was *choice*. Identified sub-themes for the SCF were: unplanned children, late childbearing, the role played by the child's other parent and unsuccessful couple relationships.

All NSCF families *actively* chose to have more than one child. Some families had two children while others had three but they all made it clear that they wanted *at least* two children.

'Two hands, two kids, sound right' NSCF-Mother

More than half of the NSCF parents chose to have two children for various reasons. For example, they believed that they could 'sustain' a family of two. They also thought their children would be there to support them in old age. Two children were seen as being manageable and some parents seemed to be very open to having a third child if their life circumstances and financial situation permitted.

We felt that we could cope and sustain having two children which was also we're in, we're in kind of a...we had the luxury of...you know living in a society where we can where we can choose and we felt that two would be...with the way that it works that we could probably...yeah having what, two meant that we could there was enough to focus on that we could give them enough. NSCF-Father

Some parents with three children reported that their choice of having more than two children was influenced by their desire to have a 'wider network', to add a 'bit more kind of jolliness to the family' and above all, not to end up with an only-child. A few parents would even consider a fourth child if it was possible.

For these larger families the notion of unity and extended family network was greatly appreciated and promoted.

M: we have three because we couldn't have any more otherwise we would have had more than three! [Laughs] that's the reason why!

F: when we had two I thought that we had someone missing so we had another one and we are all here.

M: we would have 10 if it was up to me running around!

[...]

M: yeah but we never thought of having just one child.

F: yeah it was never on the cards.

NSCF-Mother & Father

Many of these parents were strongly motivated to have more than one child since they themselves had siblings and appreciated their own experience of this. They perhaps both consciously and sub-consciously replicated the same family dynamics and composition when they formed their own family.

F: Yeah, we sort of knew that it wouldn't just be one.

M: In as much as why, I think, that probably wasn't anymore thought through and that was just how it, it was in our families, probably.

F: Um.

M: In as much as, I love, I like having siblings.

F: Yes.

M: I like having that support network.

F: Ummm.

NSCF-Mother & Father

M: well I am from a family of four so it just didn't seem... Yeah.

F: I only have one sibling but I always felt that it was an important part of my growing up... Having a sibling... So you know.

M: shared experience.

NSCF-Mother & Father

When some parents reflected on the number of children that they chose to have, they suggested that in the absence of a sibling their first born would be quite ‘lonely’ with no companionship and support.

[...] I love having a big family and I love the relationship that they have together because if we have an only child there are some thoughts that they will not have any siblings to play with. Even if a lot of siblings argue it's nice for them to... They will always be friends together and support each other. They are all from the same school and I want them to grow up being best friends. NSCF-Mother

Because... I think one... My personal perspective on single children... I have always noticed that they are lonely. There was no way that I was gonna do that. NSCF-Mother

Several parents made statements such as they ‘wouldn’t have gone one’, ‘it wouldn’t just be one’, ‘it had to be more than one’ and ‘we never thought of having just one child’. The following quote emphasises these families’ strong disincentive of forming a single-child family:

F: If we were to have one we would always go on to have two.

M: oh yeah. There was no debate about whether we were to have another one.

F: It was zero or two or more.

M: yeah.

F: we were not gonna have just one. NSCF-Mother & Father

Two NSCF highlighted the issue of feeling burdened by too many responsibilities towards ageing parents when a child does not have siblings and wanted to strictly avoid this for their first-born:

I didn’t want to have only one child. My dad was an only child and I thought...and he was a little subtenant and I always thought that was just him and it was a lot of responsibility for him as an adult child with an

ageing mother so seeing that relationship... Yeah... It's good to spread responsibility around. NSCF-Mother

A positive parental perception of sibling relationships was identified, including benefits for the child. For instance, companionship, friendship, having a support network, learning from each other, sharing with each other and, being better equipped to cope with issues in life as a result of experiencing sibling rivalry. From a parent's perspective, having more than one child was positive given that parents cannot act as siblings. As these parents' quotes highlight:

[...] They can do many things together play together [...] and I just sometimes think if [child's brother] wasn't there then what would it be like? Then I would have to try to be his friend and entertain him and there is so much that I can do that a child can do naturally that I can't do. I think... And I have seen some of my friends who are single child and they tell me "oh I don't have a friend I don't... I have friends but they move on..." but if it was a brother or sister you would always remain together so that has been not a conscious decision per say but it worked out well for him...for both of them. NSCF-Father

[...] What's interesting is, (child) will say, "oh let me tell you about this, let me tell you about that," and I'm saying, no, but if there is a really big one and I'll say yes. So it seems like (OC of friend) is telling her mum every little, tiny little bit of conflict at school. Maybe because (OC of friend) doesn't know how to deal with it and she knows she can talk to her about it. (Child) seems better adapted, to deal with it. Perhaps because the sibling rivalry and having to spar for attention with her brother and sister. She'll only tell me about serious events. NSCF-Mother

For the SCF the question is whether having only one child is an active choice? The majority of parents with an only child did not specifically choose to have an onlie, but they felt positive about it. More than half of the SCF parents reported striking benefits of not having more than one child. In some families, parents were very motivated to preserve their own freedom and maintain a quality of life which seemed to be much more possible as a one-child family. Having an only-child equated to more 'liberties' for the parents and perhaps this was mostly

from a more 'selfish' (to quote one father) stand point given that these parents were highly motivated to retain their 'own identity when you have children'.

Plus, it's also like we come to a stage in life and we want a life as well. We're starting all over again...another child is like...Oh My God another 10 to 11 years of your life really. Now she's quite independent we can actually do the things we really want to do. SCF-Father_STF

F: I think there is a slightly....could be a slightly selfish...element to it as well

M: Once you get into your routine everything is there, isn't it?

[...]

F: Now, I'm not prepared to change. You only get one life...and so actually what's important to us should be important to (child).

SCF-Mother & Father

Some mothers found having an only-child much 'easier' due to being in a better position to juggle their work-life balance.

[...] I never felt any NEED to have more children because I wasn't desperate to have more children so I think it was work life balance to sort of so... [...] I thought it would be too overwhelming and I would need to stop working.... Probably I could have managed but I didn't see it like this at the time so yeah. SCF-Mother

Nearly half of the SCF parents explicitly associated the monetary aspect of having and raising a child with their choice of having a single child. Having only one child seemed to ease 'financial strain' in the family.

M: I became a single mum, I had to look after her and then I met [partner] and then it's like OK we just getting to know each other, we moved, we relocated, I had to settle down, find a job, and we are thinking financially, we were not in a position for...

F: Yeah it's a huge strain financially also...

M: So we decided not to have any more kids among us [...]

SCF-Mother & Father_STF

Two SCF parents felt that having a second child would lead to a considerable age gap between the first and second born, which they viewed as ‘no better’ than having an only-child.

I think the most important thing about one child is the age gap [...] if she did have a brother or sister it would probably be good, but then there would be a big age gap and that's probably no better. SCF-Mother_STF

One SCF mother came from an interesting perspective of having been an only herself, and had a very positive experience. She both consciously and subconsciously chose to have only one child as a means to replicate this positive experience for the betterment of her own child. This raises an interesting unanswered question: are parents who are themselves only-children more likely to form one-child families?

I wanted one that I could give everything to yeah [...] I think because I had quite a nice upbringing as an only child, and I wanted that for my child, and I know very well that if I had any siblings then I wouldn't have all the lovely things that I had growing up. So, from a selfish point of view, I was quite happy to just bring only one child into the world and shower him with luxuries and all he wanted really... So yeah I am quite happy with that. SCF-Mother_STF

For the majority of the SCF having only one child was not an active choice, but was constrained by circumstances such as unplanned children, late childbearing, the role played by the child's other parent and unsuccessful couple relationships.

Unplanned children

In the case of four SCF being a one-child family just ‘*happened this way so it wasn't planned*’. The child was mostly the case of an ‘accident pregnancy’ or a ‘happy surprise’, and therefore there was no plan to have another one.

It just happened this way so it just happened this way so it wasn't planned. It's just yeah I don't know I mean... [...] All things combined I... before I know it [name of daughter] was born and it just happened. SCF-Mother

Late childbearing

Late childbearing was also an important contributing factor for not having more than one child. Many of these mothers considered themselves to be 'reasonably old' or 'a bit older' when they had their first child and this played a role in not considering having a second child.

[...] I'm an older mother really, I consider myself, I was 37 when I had (child) about that age anyway [...] SCF-Mother

We weren't young parents when we had (son), I was 34 so....

SCF-Mother

Role played by the child's other parent

In four SCF having an only-child was the outcome of the other parent's choice to *not* have any more children.

I'd have had a house full of kids, I'd have had them falling out the windows you know, no problem about that but ermm...no (MOTHER) said no. She, she...no, (child) hadn't been planned, she had no intention of having any kids and...that was that. SCF-Father_SP

One mother in particular explained that she 'was never ever comfortable with having just one child' and was pushed into being a mother of an only-child by the preference of the child's father. Although she accepted the status as a one-child family mostly to preserve her relationship with her husband, it was clear that she would have preferred to have more children. She was trying hard to accept her reality, which was quite frustrating for her:

[...] I've always been really against an only child [...] after a while I wanted a child and if I had a child he would want another one after that, but he never did... he stuck to his words [...] so in a sense he got a choice because we never had another child and that's the only reason and I, for a long time, I used to nag moan I want another child until one day I thought

I might, I'm gonna end up as a single parent because I am gonna push him away, he's gonna walk out cause I'm nagging him that much [...]

SCF-Mother

Unsuccessful couple relationships

In the case of many single-parent and step-families in the sample of SCF, the one-child family status was the result of unsuccessful couple relationships.

He didn't even want the first one...yeah [...] I moved in with him we bought a house and then the next thing we've got a baby but then after nine years... And I have learned recently that he wanted out he wanted to go but I had no idea at that time... SCF-Mother_SP

THEME 2: Negative personal experiences

Negative personal experiences of childbirth as well as parenting as 'first-time parents' played a key role in many parents' decision to stop at only one child.

'Horrendous birth – I could never have gone through that again'

SCF-Mother

'We realised how hard work it is in bringing up a child'.

SCF-Mother & Father

Some SCF parents found it quite challenging to raise their child. Their first time experience of parenting was mostly conceptualised as 'a lot of work', if not even 'hard work'.

F: ...and then (child) came along and I think...

M: it was not pleasant

F: no.

M: and it wasn't pleasant for some time after to be honest and I just, I just could not imagine going through that again...really, nobody prepared me for that! (laughs) SCF-Mother & Father

Moreover some were discouraged to have a larger family bearing in mind that they were both working; and had no childcare support network.

M: I would just say busy life, there's no time. And we haven't got a family here to support us in terms of looking after the child and everything. I mean we never actually said "oh we will only have one child", but then as things started like in, we both got into the job and things and then he... he got into school, we real we realised how hard work it is in err in bringing up a child mainly

F: Yes especially here, there's no fam... no other family members here, yeah. It's difficult to look after even one child sometimes...

SCF-Mother & Father

Other parents described their experience with their only-child as not being too positive, with the child viewed as being 'quite a handful'. Mothers who were single parents especially preferred not to have another child since it was already quite difficult for them to cope with all the responsibilities that parenthood entails in the absence of support from the child's father.

THEME 3: Consideration of past relationships involving partner's children

Where parents had children from previous relationships, this was an important factor influencing family size in the SCF group.

I have been there done that no more thank you very much!

SCF-Father_STF

In some of these SCF, mostly the step-families, having an only-child was due to the step-father having his own children from his past relationship/s, although not living with the family full-time. One mother explained that she only has one child as the latter also has half-siblings on the father's side.

[...] Because he had already children from his first marriage all grown-ups and as a full-time [job position] ... I am not sure whether this has been a consideration but it might have been a consideration for not having more children... SCF-Mother

I already have two from a previous marriage and I don't want any more.

SCF-Father_STF

8.6 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Findings from the interview data shed light on five specific aspects: 1) parenting, 2) parent-adolescent relationship, 3) living in a single or multiple child family at adolescence; 4) peer relationships; and, 5) reasons for having one or more children.

Parenting:

Authoritative parenting style was adopted in both groups although much less by parents of single children. By contrast, *authoritarian parenting* characterised the parents of multiple children more. *Child-centred parenting* was in both family types whereby adolescents felt that their needs and interests were prioritised by their parents. Parents in both family types showed a lot of understanding towards their child and focussed on the latter's happiness, and by using parental guidance. However, only the NOC identified their parents as 'mentors'. Adolescents in both family types enjoyed a lot of freedom including freedom of choice; in SCF this freedom of choice was granted mostly by mothers. Only-child adolescents had a lot of say in family decision-making, whilst the NSCF parents mostly remained in charge in this process. In comparison to the NSCF, some mothers of only children displayed a higher level of parental investment and put their child first and foremost regardless of their own happiness.

As for *parenting practices*, in terms of parental behavioural control, reasoning, positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement as disciplinary strategies were used in SCF. By contrast, negative reinforcement including punishment was used in NSCF. Regardless of family type, parents monitored and supervised their young adolescent closely. Parent-child conflict in the phase of early adolescence was experienced by both the OC and NOC. However, whilst the NOC had more conflict with their mother, some of the OC had more conflict with their father. In terms of parental involvement, whilst the OC reported spending a lot of time with their parents, such was not the case for the NOC. SCF mothers

were particularly highly involved with their adolescent and this perception was shared by the mothers themselves. The NSCF mostly spent time as a family rather than one-to-one. Neither group of adolescents reported being *overindulged* by their parents but the OC were still slightly more indulged. Only the OC reported being *overprotected* by their parents and this was much more prominent amongst mothers.

A few themes were specific to one-child families. Some form of *parental permissiveness* characterised the SCF (based on adolescents' and mothers' perceptions). Some SCF parents were *pushy* towards their child. Although the OC were not overindulged by their parents, they still felt *pampered*. SCF parents shared this view of themselves as pampering but they tried to justify this aspect of their parenting in relation to not having another child to cater for.

Parent-adolescent relationship:

All adolescents experienced a *positive relationship* with their parents. They also felt *close* to their parents although the OC felt closer to their mother than father reflecting a much deeper mother-child relationship than for the NOC. Parental perceptions of closeness to the adolescent differed between the two family types. SCF parents, in particular all mothers, reported sharing a very close relationship with their singleton. However, less closeness was reported by most NSCF parents. Regardless of family type and child gender, all adolescents were perceived by parents to be closer to mothers than fathers. The mother-onlie relationship was characterised by a strong form of *bonding* reported by adolescents and mothers. *Physical affection* was also part of the parent-child relationship in both family types, more so with mothers than fathers.

Parental support (maternal and paternal) characterised the parent-adolescent relationship in both family types. Most of the adolescent OC perceived a very high level of support from their mother with fewer NOC reporting similar levels. OC reported much more differential in support from mothers than fathers in comparison to NOC. Mothers and fathers in both groups perceived themselves as very supportive towards their adolescent. Mothers of OC in particular, reported adopting problem-solving behaviours to support their singleton. Likewise, the OC experienced a high level of emotional support especially from their mother. All

adolescents sought this type of support from the mother more than the father. In the same vein, in both groups, mothers more than fathers provided emotional support. Interestingly, some SCF mothers sought emotional support from their adolescent OC; an aspect of the parent-adolescent relationship not identified in the NSCF.

Living in a single or multiple child family at adolescence:

Adolescents in both groups and SCF parents perceived advantages and disadvantages linked to their family type. Positive differences as a multiple-child family were not reported by the NSCF parents. Regarding the *positives*, the OC appreciated not having to share anything with a sibling including their mother. They felt more privileged; experienced a better parent-child relationship; enjoyed more parental attention and affection; and, spent more time with their parents. SCF parents felt closer to their singleton, enjoyed more openness as a one-child family and perceived a better quality of the parent-child relationship. The NOC mostly emphasised the importance of having a sibling to spend time with; play with; enjoy a close sibling relationship; having that someone as a sibling to communicate; and importantly, for company.

As for the *negatives*, loneliness was the only disadvantage associated with being an only-child although some embraced their 'alone time'. Some SCF parents raised concerns about pampering their only-child; experiencing more parent-child conflicts; allowing the singleton too much say in family decision-making; being too lenient with the child; the absence of sibling support for their only; and also, the feeling of loneliness in the child's present and future life. Sibling rivalry, arguments with siblings and not having their parents' attention were negative differences associated with living in a multiple-child family by many of the NOC. Having a sibling was commonly viewed as quite annoying, and some of them felt responsible for their younger siblings. Similarly, the NSCF parents reported a few concerns. Some referred to issues such as the lack of openness in the parent-child relationship; not spending enough one-on-one time with their child; and, facing more hardships to manage and cope with everyday life as a larger family.

Overall, both the OC and NOC felt *happy* about their status as either an only-child or one with sibling/s despite the aforementioned disadvantages. In fact, neither of them would have preferred to be in the shoes of the other.

Peer relationships:

The adolescent OC experienced as *positive a relationship with their peers* as the adolescent NOC and both groups actively socialised with friends. The OC relied on their friends as well as on their mother for emotional support. Being an only-child also had some positive influence on peer relationships. Some OC reported finding it easier to make friends in the absence of siblings and they did not feel excluded by their peers given their only-child status. They also related to their friends as substitute siblings which helped them to cope with the loneliness they experienced as an only-child.

Reasons for having an only child or more than one:

The majority of the SCF did not actively choose to have just one child. However, they still reported positive outcomes associated to being part of a one-child family. For example, more freedom to enjoy life and better quality of life. Other reasons accounting for the formation of a single-child family were specific life circumstances such as unplanned children, late childbearing, the role played by the child's other parent in terms of not wanting any more children and unsuccessful couple relationships. Negative personal experiences (e.g. difficult childbirth/pregnancy and first-time parenting) as well as the consideration of past relationships involving partner's children (e.g. in the case of step-families) were also factors. The NSCF parents actively chose not to have just one child. These families perceived several benefits to having more than one child such as their children to support them when they age, having a support system for their children and also, replicating their own positive experience living as a child with sibling/s. Interestingly, single-child families in the eyes of some NSCF were a cause for concern especially in relation to only-children feeling lonely in the absence of a sibling, being burdened by responsibilities associated with ageing parents, and also, the absence of sibling support.

In light of the research questions of this study, the next chapter will discuss the key findings (quantitative and qualitative) in line with existing research evidence on parenting in single-child families and the wellbeing of only-children.

CHAPTER IX: DISCUSSION

This thesis had two main aims: 1) to explore the parenting styles and practices used in single-child families in comparison to those in multiple children families, and how parenting varies with child gender, parent gender and family structure; 2) to examine the extent to which parenting is associated with the well-being of adolescents and how well-being varies in single-child and multiple children families. This chapter adopts a triangulation approach to integrate the key findings from the survey data, observation data and interview data across both groups of participants (adolescents and parents) to meet these aims.

9.1 Interpretation of main findings

9.1.1 Parenting styles and practices

Survey data revealed that there was no relationship between family type (single-child families – SCF vs. multiple children families - NSCF) and positive and negative parenting (parental and adolescent reports). Likewise, observational data revealed very few significant differences in parent-child interactions between one-child and non-one child families. These findings contribute towards answering the question as to whether adolescents without siblings are parented differently from those with a sibling in UK families (Russell, 2013; Johnson, 2014). More importantly, they challenge existing negative stereotypes revolving around parenting in single-child families (Mancillas, 2006), suggesting that there are no differences between family types on these broad measures of parenting constructs. Other quantitative studies such as Thomas-Johnson (2005) and Clarfield (1999) similarly reported no significant differences in parenting between one-child and multiple-children families although in US samples. In sharp contrast, interview findings successfully captured some differences in parenting between the two groups. Whilst quantitative data was based on the use of standardised questionnaires and a structured play task, interviews offered a platform for families to provide narratives that helped to identify more subtle differences in parenting styles as well as practices between family types.

9.1.1.1 Authoritative parenting style

The authoritative parenting style was less prevalent in single-child families, according to the interviews. This suggests that parents of single children tend to be more lenient than parents with multiple children. However, this may be due to the one-child family sample in the current study having more varied family structures, since authoritative parenting is more characteristic of intact two-parent families (Chan & Koo, 2011).

9.1.1.2 Authoritarian parenting style

By contrast, interview findings showed that authoritarian parenting characterised the multiple more than the one-child families in the current study. Lu and Chang (2013) also identified less implementation of an authoritarian parenting style in Chinese one-child families. However, a new finding in the current study was that some SCF parents did report being *pushy* parents. It could be argued that although the SCF parents were not consciously authoritarian, some were still acting as pushy parents given that their sole focus remains on their singleton, and they aspire for them to be the best that they can. There has been some speculation on this topic in popular media – “perhaps it's going too far to say that parents of only children are more likely to be pushy or to seem pushy to their children” (Hines, 2013, p.1). Findings from the current study contradict this as pushy parenting was indeed identified in the sample of one-child families.

9.1.1.3 Parental permissiveness

A few adolescent only-children and their mothers reported some *parental permissiveness* in the interviews. However, this was not equivalent to neglectful parenting as these mothers were mostly responsive although less demanding (Darling, 1999), and also did not show more negative parenting on the survey. In terms of disciplinary parenting practices, both adolescent and parental reports revealed that reasoning, positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement were implemented as strategies in SCF. By contrast, reasoning and positive reinforcement were not reported by either the non-only children (NOC) or the NSCF parents, whereas punishment was. These findings further emphasise the adoption of a more flexible and easy-going parenting style in one-child families. This fits in with previous research finding that permissive parenting is more likely

in single-child families (Liu, 2010), and that adolescent only-children are less subjected to punishments (Kloepper et al., 1981).

9.1.1.4 Child-centred parenting

Are single-child families child-centred as anticipated? In the absence of a validated quantitative measure of child-centred parenting, interview findings revealed that child-centred parenting was used in both family types but characterised the one-child families more on specific levels such as family decision-making and parental investment. In line with past research on child-centred parenting (e.g.s. Cannella, 1997; Cannella & Viruru, 2004), both groups prioritised the needs and interests of their adolescent, respected the autonomy of the child as a growing adolescent and granted freedom of choice to them. Regarding freedom, using a sample of 16 to 18 year olds, Kloepper, Leonard and Huang (1981) also reported that both family types granted a lot of freedom to their adolescent. Other research such as Way et al. (2013) showed that mothers of adolescent onlies in particular granted considerable freedom of choice to the only-child. However, some SCF mothers did engage in higher parental investment for the sake of their child's happiness and were prepared to prioritise their child's needs and happiness over their own. Although child-centredness has been attributed to western parenting ideals generally (Eurochild, 2010), these new findings suggest it is a type of parenting more prominent in families with just one child.

Allowing the child an input in family decision-making process is yet another form of child-centred parenting (Oryan & Gastil, 2013) which was also more common for the only-child families in the current study. This raises an important question as to whether the singleton is treated more like a 'mini adult' with their voice being heard much more than a non-only child? This portrays the one-child family as being less hierarchical than multiple-children families bearing in mind that many NSCF parents reported being mainly in charge of family decisions.

9.1.1.5 Pampering parenting style

As quoted in chapter 1, ‘lay persons generally believe that parents of only children are inclined to overindulge and pamper their offspring which results in producing unhappy, selfish and disturbed individuals’ (Mottus, Indus, & Allik, 2008, p. 1047). Interview findings revealed that although the adolescent only-children reported not being overindulged by their parents, they were more indulged than the non-only children. Parents in both family types also reported not overindulging their child. However, some SCF parents experienced internal conflict suggesting that although they felt the urge to indulge their child, they also seemed to be aware that they should not spoil them. This finding challenges the long-held common perception that an only-child is one that is bound to have “his own way in everything” (Bohannon, 1898, p. 493). However, these only-children were still pampered especially on a materialistic level, which supports public perceptions on only-children to some extent (e.g. Baskett, 1985). In China, only-children have long been labelled as ‘little emperors’ (Cassandra, 2001). Is it also the case for British only-children to a degree? This is an area which warrants further empirical attention including using validated quantitative measures of pampering parenting style.

9.1.1.6 Overprotective parenting

Also, in support of public perceptions (Blake, 1981) and of previous research (e.g. Howe & Madgett, 1975; Goodman, 1996), only the singletons reported being overprotected by their parents in the interviews. In line with this, factor analysis of parenting variables based on adolescent reports identified overprotection as a component of negative parenting. Overprotective parental behaviours in this study revolved around parental over-involvement, close monitoring, parental expectations for the child to report to them when outside of home, child feeling somewhat ‘controlled’ by the parents and, the perception that their parents are overly concerned about them. Whilst some only-children related to this type of parenting as a form of affection, others experienced it as negative, and it is known that overprotecting children can cause them anxiety (Laurin, Joussemet, Tremblay, & Boivin, 2015). That said, the only-children in this study did not show more emotional problems than their peers. Most of the SCF mothers were fully aware of their overprotective nature towards their child, and often

justified this in the context of having just the one child. Their main objective was to keep this child safe all the time, which has also been reported in past studies on overprotectiveness (Hullmann et al., 2010; Brussoni & Olsen, 2013; Pimentel, 2012). These findings on child safety also shed some light on the prevalence of parental protectiveness which is not to be confused with overprotection (Ungar, 2009; Valentine, 2004). Perhaps in the context of child safety the SCF parents were more *very protective* rather than overprotective which could explain the absence of a negative impact on the well-being of the adolescent only-children.

According to Falbo (1978; 1982; 1983) parents who are not able to have a second child are more likely to engage in overprotective parenting. The majority of the SCF in this study did not actively choose to form a single-child family. So, it is plausible that this could go some way to explaining their overprotective nature. Research on overprotectiveness in one-child families could help increase understanding of helicopter parenting with a focus on parental over-involvement more generally (Brenning et al., 2017). Importantly and as shown in the current study, the aforementioned differences might not be captured using quantitative measures. As such, this reinforces the need for more qualitative research in this area.

9.1.1.7 The parent-adolescent relationship in single-child families

According to McShane and Hastings (2009) overprotection also reflects a *very close parent-child bond*. Interestingly, child-centred parenting also involves the formation of strong parent-child bonds (Ivan, Da Roit, & Knijn, 2015). SCF parents, especially all mothers, shared a very close relationship with their singleton. By contrast, most of the NSCF parents shared a “fairly” close relationship with their adolescent and perceived their role mostly as a parental figure. The lack of differences in quantitative measures of parenting or interactions indicates that it is not the case that NSCF families had difficult or negative parent-child relationships. Instead, the only-children and the mother had a very special relationship perhaps reflecting the mothers spending considerable time with their child (Craig et al., 2014). Although close parent-child relationships can have positive implications for the wellbeing of a growing adolescent (e.g.

Field et al., 2002; Rodgers & Rose; 2002; Paavonen, 2004), past research raised some concerns about adaptive risks associated with mother-child relationships being too close, enmeshed and with little differentiation (Rothbaum et al., 2002). Closeness in parent-child relationships in SCF has also been identified in past research on adult only-children in US (Roberts & Blanton, 2001) and Chinese late adolescents (Wei, 2005). In fact, in line with individuation theory, early adolescents strive to develop a close relationship with their caregivers (Collins & Steinberg, 2006). That said, to date, this aspect of the parent-onlie relationship in early adolescence has not been widely explored.

Based on observation data, the only significant difference in parent-child interactions was that only-children showed more persistence/attention when on task with the mother than did children with siblings. This further supports the close relationship and strong mother-child bond between an only-child and the mother. Furthermore, survey data showed that adolescent OC reported experiencing more negative parenting from fathers than adolescent non-only children. Taken together, these current findings point towards a much stronger relationship between the mother and her only-child than the father and his only-child. Perhaps the SCF fathers struggled to find their place in the life of their onlie with the latter mostly involved with the mother; whereas in the case of the NSCF fathers, adolescents reported not differentiating much between their two parents. This raises an important unanswered question: do fathers of an adolescent only-child mostly find themselves playing the ‘bad cop’ with the mothers primarily taking on the role of the ‘good cop’ when parenting?

In line with this, the majority of the adolescent OC perceived extremely high maternal support, above that of most of the NOC (although their mothers were still very supportive). There is accumulating evidence suggesting that parental support has a positive effect on adolescent subjective wellbeing (Rueth, Otterpohl, & Wild, 2016; Kocayoruk, 2012; Ortman, 1988; Suldo & Huebner, 2004) including maternal support specifically (e.g. Barber & Harmon, 2002; Cooper, Shaver, & Collins, 1998; Crittenden, Claussen, & Sugarman, 1994; Steinberg, 1990 as cited in Neff & McGehee, 2010). Mothers of only-children in particular reported adopting problem-solving behaviours to support their

singleton. This type of intervention was not reported by parents in NSCF and could indicate the SCF mothers' high reliance on proactive parenting practices (Padilla-Walker, Christensen, & Day, 2011). This ties in with the finding above of strong mother-only relationship and also, their overprotective and over-involved parenting behaviours which might encourage their child not to develop self-reliance. Likewise a high level of emotional support characterised the mother-only relationship. This again provides further support to the existing strong mother-child relationship in SCF. In fact, the depth of and mutuality in this relationship becomes even more undisputable as some SCF mothers equally sought emotional support from their adolescent OC.

9.1.1.8 Parenting practices

Whilst survey data primarily revolved around parenting styles rather than practices, the adolescent OC reported spending considerable time with their parents based on interview data. Family time spent with the only-child was mostly on a one-on-one basis while in the case of the NSCF, parents reported spending time mostly as a family. In fact, some NSCF parents raised concerns about not being able to spend individual time with their adolescent with the latter's sibling demanding equal attention. As speculated by Jefferies (2001) in the context of British families, in the absence of a sibling, the singleton is in a better position to benefit from more parental time. Time investment in a child has been recognised as a form of positive parenting (Wall, 2010) with a positive effect on child development (Monna & Gauthier, 2008). As such, these results suggest that parenting in one-child families could entail positive outcomes for the parent-child relationship.

9.1.2 How parenting varies with child gender, parent gender and family structure?

9.1.2.1 Child and parent gender

Mothers and fathers take on different roles when parenting adolescents and their roles can be influenced by child gender (Day & Padilla Walker, 2009). However, the survey data analysis did not report any significant effect of child gender on parenting (maternal and paternal) except that male adolescents in this

study benefitted from less positive parenting from mothers than females. However, child gender did not have any significant effect on fathers' parenting, similar to past research by Brussoni and Olsen (2013).

Whilst the survey data analysis found no significant effect of parent gender on parenting, interview data analysis revealed a more subtle effect of this variable on parenting. Across several parenting dimensions mothers more than fathers were found to play a determining role, especially in SCF, supporting the notion that mothering and fathering do not necessarily always correlate; particularly for adolescents (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). For example, in SCF, overprotective parenting was much more prominent amongst mothers than fathers and freedom of choice was granted by mothers more than fathers. Previous research has also shown that over-protective and child-centred parenting is associated with mothers more than fathers (Holmbeck et al., 2002; Saldinger, Porterfield, & Cain, 2004).

Interestingly, whilst the NOC had more conflict with their mother, some of the OC had more conflict with their father. Moreover the OC reported feeling closer to their mother than father. Again, these findings tie in with the strong bond shared by the mother and her only-child. Where the SCF included a step-father, mothers perceived their adolescent to be less close to the step-father, which can be explained by parental investment being less for step than biological children (Hofferth & Anderson, 2003; Case, Lin, & McLanahan, 2000).

The OC perceived their mother to be more involved with them than their father. Based on parental perceptions fathers were found to be less involved than mothers in both family types despite growing research pointing towards a gradual increase in paternal involvement especially in intact families (Cabrera et al., 2000). Some fathers of girls reported being more involved with their sons. Similarly, Yeung et al. (1999) reported that fathers tend to spend more time with their sons than daughters. Fathers of sons have also been shown to be more involved in school matters and general activities than fathers of daughters suggesting fathers' involvement is more influenced by child gender than is mothers' (Lamb et al., 1987; Morgan et al., 1988).

Similar to involvement, paternal support was seen as lower than maternal support by all adolescents, and both groups sought emotional support mostly from their mother. In both family types, mothers more than fathers (including step-fathers) reported approaching their child to offer emotional support. These findings further reinforce the influence of parent gender on parent-adolescent relationships in favour of a more active role played by the mother than the father regardless of family type. Nonetheless the OC perceived a higher level of maternal support than the NOC, again emphasising the strong mother-child bond in single-child families.

9.1.2.2 Family structure

Survey data analysis showed that adolescents from families with one step-parent scored higher on negative maternal parenting than those from intact families. Furthermore having an intact family with two-parents was predictive of more positive parenting from fathers than other family structures based on adolescent reports. With specific reference to SCF, interview data analysis revealed that authoritarian parenting was mostly seen in step-families. Past research has shown that in the case of step-families parent-child conflict can be rather intense (Fine & Schwebel, 1992) including with the biological mother in the presence of a step-father (Dunn, Davies, O'Connor, & Sturgess, 2000). In addition, the survey data analysis revealed that fathers from single-parent families scored higher on positive parenting than fathers from intact families. Although this finding applies to SCF as well as NSCF, there is some evidence suggesting that in the case of single-child families the single-parent often relates to the singleton as a 'substitute mate' (Hawke & Knox, 1977), resulting in a 'less hierarchical' family set up (Weiss, 1979) which could result in more positive parenting from lone-fathers. New studies should examine the influence of family structure on parenting by controlling for the number of children in the family.

9.1.3 The extent to which parenting is associated with the well-being of adolescents and how well-being varies in single-child families and multiple children families

9.1.3.1 Parenting and adolescent wellbeing

Based on parents' survey reports, adolescent problem levels increase as negative parenting increases and positive parenting decreases from both mothers and fathers. Adolescent survey self-reports also showed that adolescent problem levels increase as negative parenting from fathers increases whereas more positive parenting from mothers was predictive of less difficulties. Past research established that positive parent-child relationships have a positive effect on adolescent well-being (Ryan, Stiller, & Lynch, 1994; van Wel, ter Bogt, & Raaijmakers, 2002). In the current study positive parenting comprises authoritative parenting. Previous studies reported that autonomy supportive relationships with parents promoted subjective well-being of 14 to 18 year olds as well as psychosocial adjustment of early adolescents (Rueth, Otterpohl, & Wild, 2016). In the present research negative parenting clustered around separation anxiety, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. The positive relationship between negative parenting and adolescent problem levels identified in this study finds support from a recent meta-analysis concluding that there exists a strong association between psychological control, authoritarian parenting and internalising problems in young people (Pinquart, 2017). Cooklin et al. (2013) also reported a negative effect of maternal separation anxiety on socio-emotional wellbeing. With regards to British adolescents, Maynard and Harding (2010) reported higher levels of psychological difficulties amongst adolescents exposed to authoritarian parenting. Therefore, the current adolescent wellbeing outcomes in relation to positive and negative parenting are in line with and contribute to existing literature in this area.

Based on adolescent survey self-reports, life satisfaction increases as positive parenting from mothers and fathers increases. There is accumulating research evidence confirming a positive association between positive parenting underlying parental support (Ortman, 1988; Suldo & Huebner, 2004), parental warmth (Pinquart et al., 2004), and authoritative parenting (Milevsky, Schlechter, Klem & Kehl, 2008), and life satisfaction amongst adolescents (Ortman, 1988; Suldo & Huebner, 2004). The current study finds support for this relationship in early adolescence. Also, social acceptance increases as positive parenting from mothers increases. Putnick et al. (2008) identified a similar link between maternal acceptance and social acceptance in young adolescents. However, as it stands,

research on parenting and the wellbeing of early adolescents is scant, so future research could build on this while also focusing on single-child families.

9.1.3.2 Family type (SCF vs. NSCF) and adolescent wellbeing

Since the survey data analysis did not reveal any differences in parenting by family type, differences in adolescent wellbeing outcomes were not expected either. Indeed based on parental survey reports, family type did not have any effect on adolescent problem levels (SDQ total difficulties and impact scores) and was not a significant predictor of adolescent difficulties. In addition, no differences between adolescent OC and NOC self-reports were found in terms of social acceptance, close friendships and life satisfaction. Previous studies likewise did not find any effect of the only-child status on adolescent wellbeing (Veenhoven & Verkuyten, 1989; Glenn & Hope, 1984). Notably, when other variables are taken into account, being a non-only child was predictive of higher difficulties. In fact, current findings seem to point towards more negative differences in wellbeing for adolescents from multiple-children families than single-child families. Past research on only-children has attributed the parent-child relationship as a main factor contributing to the positive developmental outcomes of these children (Blake, 1989; Mellor, 1990; Polit & Falbo, 1987; Poston & Falbo, 1990; Mancillas, 2006). Interestingly this ties in with current findings; the OC reported experiencing more maternal support, affection, attention, mother-child closeness and parental involvement than the NOC. As such, it is plausible that these positive differences in parent-adolescent relationship in SCF could account for less perceived difficulties amongst the adolescent OC than the NOC.

Adolescent self-reports revealed that family type was a significant predictor of self-compassion; adolescent only-children reported themselves as more self-compassionate than their counterparts. Neff and McGeehee (2010) explained that an adolescent in a positive family environment with a secure attachment pattern with a supportive mother is likely to have higher self-compassion as a result of positive modelling of care and compassion. Thus, the effect on self-compassion could be due to the OC having a very supportive and close bond with their mother. However, given that neither positive nor negative parenting was associated with self-compassion based on adolescents' self-reports

in the current study the above explanation is merely a speculation which needs to be tested in future research. There is accumulating research evidence supporting the link between self-compassion and wellbeing of young people (Neff, 2003; Neff, 2009; Heffernan, Griffin, McNulty, & Fitzpatrick, 2010; Hollis-Walker & Colosimo, 2011; Neff & McGehee, 2010; Bluth & Blanton, 2013). Past research also suggested that feelings of self-worth are related to positive peer relationships (Dekovic & Meeus, 1997). Hence the next question is: would the adolescent only-children who scored high on self-compassion also experience positive peer relationships?

9.1.3.3 Peer relationships

Rivera and Carrasquillo (1997) raised some concerns about only-children struggling to make friends. However, the survey data analysis found no differences in both social acceptance and close friendships between the OC and NOC. Furthermore interview findings revealed that there were no differences in the experience of positive peer relationships between both groups. In fact, the adolescent OC felt at an advantage in comparison to the NOC as they found it easier to make friends with no siblings around. Friends were treated as substitute siblings suggesting that friendship was important for these only-children to cope with the loneliness they experienced in the absence of siblings. Findings are in line with Johnson's (2014) focus on the importance of friendships for only children, and dispute the claims of others that siblings are necessary for optimal development of interpersonal relationships (e.g. Bossard & Boll, 1956; Sutton-Smith & Rosenberg, 1970; Terhune, 1974; Kitzmann, Cohen, & Lockwood, 2002). In support of current findings, Yucel and Downey (2015) found that number of siblings did not correlate with peer relationship quality amongst early adolescents in UK. In the same vein, no differences were found between adolescent only and non-only children on peer nominations of friendship (Zeher & Downey, 2013) and social skills amongst Chinese only-children (Meredith, Abott, & Ming, 1992).

Adolescent self-reports revealed that close friendships decreased as negative parenting from mothers increased. There is evidence suggesting that negative parenting in the form of psychological control and coercion is a predictor

of negative peer relationships (e.g. bullying) in western and non-western countries (Nelson & Crick, 2002; Hart, Newell, & Olsen, 2003; Nelson et al., 2006). Moreover the meta-analysis of Lereya, Samara and Wolke (2013) concluded that negative parenting is associated with bullying whilst positive parenting is a significant protective factor against peer victimisation. Similar findings pertaining to the association between positive parenting and positive peer relationships specific to adolescents aged 12 to 18 years were reported by Dekovic and Meeus (1997) as well as Engels, Dekovic and Meeus (2002). Barbara (1985) stated that positive parenting practices such as parental involvement positively influence an only-child's sociability. In line with this, a high level of parental involvement was reported by both the OC and the SCF parents in this study.

9.1.3.4 The adolescent's experience of being an only child or a child with sibling/s

Positive differences

There is a perception that compared to first-borns, only-children are more self-centred and selfish (Nyman, 1995). Using the rich data from the qualitative phase the experience of only-children was also captured in the current study. Interestingly, adolescent OC appreciated not having to share anything with a sibling including their mother. Showing an unwillingness to 'share' the 'mum' further consolidates the notion that the relationship an only-child has with their mother is very special. Overall, the OC's self-centredness ties in with existing strong cultural negative beliefs about only children in our society (Falbo, 1982). However as also pointed out by Falbo, only-children learn the importance of sharing as they grow up and interact with peers, which suggests that this finding would not necessarily apply to older adolescent singletons. In fact, it is plausible to assume that being self-centred in early adolescence is a behaviour common to all young adolescents, and hence not unique to singletons.

Adolescent OC also felt more privileged; experienced a better parent-child relationship; enjoyed more parental attention and affection; and, spent more time with their parents. SCF parents felt closer to their singleton, enjoyed more openness as a one-child family and perceived a better quality of the parent-child relationship. Reported positive differences in parent-child relationship from both

parents' and adolescents' perspectives seem to point towards the possibility that only-children are at an advantage. Better parent-child relationships, including more parental attention, were also reported by Roberts and Blanton (2001) amongst American adult onlies. Importantly, the above qualitative findings contradict conclusions from Falbo and Polit's (1986) quantitative review that there are minimum differences in parent-child relationships between only and non-only children. In fact and in line with the aforementioned review, quantitative findings in the current study also did not point towards any major differences in parent-child relationships between SCF and NSCF families. However, non-only children saw benefits to having a sibling. They emphasised the importance of having a sibling to spend time with; play with; enjoy a close sibling relationship; having that someone to talk to; and importantly, for company. Therefore, do the adolescent OC in this study perceive missing out on any or all of these advantages?

Negative differences

Loneliness was the only disadvantage associated with being an only-child in the eyes of the adolescents, as also seen in other research on only-children (e.g.s. McKibben, 1998; Wei, 2005). However, some OC embraced this loneliness and experienced it mostly as their 'alone time', again reflecting findings from previous research (Roberts & Blanton, 2001). Some SCF parents raised concerns about several issues pertaining to having and raising an only-child including pampering their child; more parent-child conflicts; allowing the singleton too much say in family decision-making; being too lenient; and the absence of sibling support for their onlie. Thus, these parents today share some apprehension raised in popular discourse about the risk attached to parents of only-children as being more likely to 'spoil' them (Ward, 1930).

With regards to the NOC, several negative differences associated with living in a multiple-child family were reported: 'annoying' siblings, feeling responsible for younger siblings, sibling rivalry, arguments with siblings and not having enough of their parents' attention. From parents' perspectives issues such as a lack of openness in the parent-child relationship; not spending enough one-on-one time with their adolescent; and, facing more hardships to manage and cope

with everyday life as a larger family were also reported. Some of these negative differences (i.e. less parental attention and parental involvement including less closeness) were translated by parents in the other group into positive differences associated with living in a single-child family.

A major cause for concern is in relation to the role played by adult only-children towards their ageing parents. Adult only-children are likely to have more responsibilities to shoulder while carrying the burden of ageing parents in the absence of sibling support. This was mentioned by some NSCF parents in this research with similar findings reported by adult only-children themselves in the study of Roberts and Blanton (2001).

Nonetheless, overall, both the OC and the NOC felt *happy* about their status as either an only-child or one with sibling/s. In fact, neither of them would have preferred to be in the shoes of the other. With specific reference to the adolescent OC, despite the negative stereotyping of only-children as mostly unhappy individuals, there is evidence suggesting that these children are happy despite having no sibling (Glenn & Hoppe, 1984; Newman, 2001; McKibben, 1998).

9.2 Implications of current findings

First and foremost, findings from this first study on parenting in single-child families and the wellbeing of adolescent singletons in UK are novel and a stepping stone for future research where this family type is on the rise.

9.2.1 Theoretical implications

In line with family systems theory which reinforces the notion of interdependence of subsystems (Bowen, 1975; Kantor & Lehr, 1975), overall findings from the current study reflect an existing interrelationship between parents, only-children and also, peers in different ways. For example, parent-adolescent discrepancies when reporting their experiences were minimal. Findings from parents and the young adolescents mostly converged which reflect shared mutuality in terms of how they perceived family dynamics including the parent-adolescent relationship in one-child families. The adolescent only-children experienced a positive relationship with their parents and with their peers, which

also suggest a possible underlying link between these two sub-systems. Furthermore, the strong mother-onlie bond identified in this research from both parents' and adolescents' perspectives provides further support to the prevalence of mutual family relations in this family type.

Attachment patterns and relational processes within the family are inter-linked (Hooper, 2007). This is reflected in the strong parent-child bond characterised by closeness and high support between the mother and her singleton identified in this study. Therefore it is clear that the mother occupies a very important place in the life of an only-child. However, does this strong *bond* shared by the dyad impact the father-onlie relationship? In support of family systems theory, the close relationship between singletons and their mothers may make the relationship with their father less close. This is in fact evidenced in this study with the adolescent only-children sharing weaker ties with the father on several levels (e.g.s. closeness, support and bonding). However, it remains unclear whether reduced bonding in the father-child relationship is an outcome of the mother being significantly involved in the life of the only-child or, rather simply an effect of parent gender. Further empirical attention could explore this.

The inclusion of fathers in this study provided insight into British fathers' parenting and interactions with their adolescent only-child. This contributes towards developing a first understanding of the role played by the father in the life of an only-child. Moreover, in the context of one-child families, the nature of the father-child relationship can also point towards important implications for the wellbeing of a young adolescent without siblings.

Contrary to previous claims, this study showed that overprotection is not problematic (if not pathological) for the adolescent only-children. Nevertheless since there is some evidence suggesting that bonding and overprotection can overlap in the parent-child relationship (McShane & Hastings, 2009), at this stage, it is still difficult to have a clear picture of how this interrelationship could impact the wellbeing of the only-child from a family systems perspective.

9.2.2 Practical implications

Currently there is a dearth of empirical research regarding parenting only-children and its association with their well-being. Parents of only-children in UK are mostly relying on discussion forums and websites such as Mumsnet and Netmums to seek information on this matter. Therefore one of the main implications of current findings is the opportunity to address this gap in knowledge in response to the growing number of single-child families in UK and in other countries. Importantly, current findings clearly provide reassurance to parents who are concerned about having only one child in light of existing negative stereotypes of single-child families; in a nutshell, minimum significant differences between OC and NOC in terms of parenting and well-being; positive differences associated with living in one-child families; OC scoring higher on self-compassion than NOC; and, less perceived problem levels for OC than NOC all imply that onlies and the ‘beanpole’ families are not at a disadvantage in comparison to multiple-children children. Current findings also help to have a better understanding of specific aspects of the parent-adolescent relationship that are unique to single-child families (e.g. the special bond that exists between an only-child and the mother).

Perhaps an important question raised and addressed in this research is how much of a difference between one-child and multiple-children families exists in reality? The general picture portrays less than expected gaps between them on both the parenting (e.g. child-centredness and the overall positive nature of the parent-adolescent relationship) and wellbeing level (e.g., social acceptance, close friendships and life satisfaction). Therefore this implies that the increase in one-child families which is now becoming the *new norm* (Hawke & Knox, 1977; Peck, 1977; Pearce, Cantisani, & Laihonon, 1999; Falbo, 1982) including in the UK (The Guardian, 2018) is not necessarily a cause for concern. Current findings favour a more positive attitude towards this family type and strongly challenge cultural beliefs pertaining to multiple-children families as being the ‘ideal’ family type.

Nonetheless some of the findings also provide evidence for certain existing stereotypes whereby as speculated by lay persons, parents of an adolescent only-child were indeed found to be more overprotective and indulgent

than parents with multiple children. With regards to pampering, since adolescent only-children in the present study scored higher on self-compassion than their counterparts the association between pampering and the wellbeing of only-children is yet to be thoroughly examined. Moreover higher self-compassion in OC than NOC implies that the number of children in a family matters and in this case, in favour of children without siblings. Perhaps this also implies that only-children benefit from better subjective wellbeing than non-only children.

Quite recently, some researchers (e.g. Hall, Shebib, & Scharp, 2018) referred to over parenting as an umbrella concept which also encompasses an element of overprotection. They conceptualised over parenting as being well-intentioned although developmentally inappropriate, and strongly argued that in line with confirmation theory, over parenting is actually a sign of a lack of challenge and hence not ideal. However, although current findings have shown that parents of an adolescent only-child tend to be considerably overprotective and more so than parents with multiple-children, it is unclear if these parents view this parenting behaviour as negative or rather justified in the context of a teenage only-child. Furthermore although being overprotective towards an adolescent only-child could have important implications for the wellbeing of the child, this study did not find any negative effect of overprotective parenting on adolescent well-being, so parental overprotection may not be problematic in early adolescence. This type of parenting has increased over the years (Ungar, 2009) especially in middle and upper class families (Patton, 2012), which often are the ones with no more than one child. As such, parents of adolescent only-children should be given some professional support and advice to better cope with overprotection as a parenting practice; one which seems to be much more common in this family type.

Although child-centred parenting characterised both family types, it was still more prominent in SCF. With growing attention on child-centred parenting, especially in UK (Lewis, 2011), it is anticipated to have positive implications for the developmental outcomes of adolescents and even more so for only-children. However, there is some concern raised about the extent to which “parents should do what is in the best interests of their child” (Blustein, 2012, p. 199). Moreover, taking into account that child-centred parenting is yet to be operationalised as a

specific type of parenting (Hoffman, 2013), more work has to be carried out in this area to address whether single-child families are more likely to benefit or suffer from a potentially enhanced child-centred parenting approach.

The qualitative results provided a closer look at the ‘reality’ of British one-child families and the reasons why this family type has been on the rise over the last few decades. There has been some speculation pertaining to *choice* as the main reason explaining the increase in one-child families in the UK. However, this study showed that having an only-child is not always by choice and that other factors account for this growing number. Disseminating these findings could assist the society in being better prepared to first understand, accept, welcome and assist in the integration of ‘the rising family of tomorrow: the Beanpole family’. One-child families as a type of ‘Beanpole’ families are smaller family units compared to multiple-children families and it was speculated in the late 1990s that the ‘Beanpole’ structure could potentially characterise the majority of families in future society (Farkas & Hogan, 1995). This is especially relevant taking into account that this study also revealed that the multiple-children families actively chose *not* to have an only child, reflecting concerns stemming from negative stereotyping of the single-child family.

9.3 Study evaluation

9.3.1 Strengths

45.3% of dependent children in the UK are still classified as only children (ONS, 2015)

Despite statistical evidence and increasing media attention given to the rise of one-child families in UK, to date, there has been very little research on this family type. The current study is the first to bring British one-child families in the limelight of empirical research in the field of parenting and adolescent wellbeing, and to look at the whole family, including hearing from the adolescents themselves.

Falbo (1982) recommended that differences in developmental outcomes between only and non-only children should be examined in line with their developmental stage. This has been considered in the present study by only

focusing on adolescents from a specific age group. The varying family structures of the single-child families sampled in this study also reflect an attempt to consider “the heterogeneity within the only-child category” (Falbo, 2012, p. 47). Furthermore, probing into the reasons for having an only child in the family interviews contributed towards providing a first insight into *why* ‘beanpole’ families in the form of one-child families might be gradually ‘becoming the norm’ in the UK and elsewhere (Choi & Monden, 2017).

Mixed-methods approach

This study is founded in a mixed-method approach with findings from survey data, observation data (parent-child interactions) and family interviews; all complementing each other based on an embedded research design. The *lived* parenting experiences, the adolescents’ experience of being parented as well as the nature of the parent-adolescent relationship in single-child families were more intricately revealed from family interviews than family surveys and the observational method. This is in line with Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) who stated that the most appropriate way to gain an insight into the subjective experience of people is by questioning them and listening actively to their responses. Doing so also helped to look at how the adolescents and their parents have differing perspectives and experiences. Past studies focusing on the experience of singletons (e.g. Fletcher, 2014; Roberts & Blanton, 2001) have relied on interviews either as their principal data collection method or as part of a mixed-methods approach. Since the investigation of the influence of child and parent gender on parenting is rather complex, the semi-structured interview was most successful in offering an in-depth understanding of how parent gender played a crucial role in shaping the parenting of single-child families. Moreover, the concept of child-centred parenting was explored in the interviews which helped to complement the parental survey findings. The suitability of this approach especially in terms of the flexibility it provided for exploring participant free responses in-depth is noteworthy in the absence of a validated child-centred parenting measure.

The issue of social desirability is always a major pitfall of self-report data. Conversely, standardised observational tasks such as the AMCIES help provide a

more detailed and reliable insight into parent-child interactions (Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2000; Iqbal, 2012). It could be argued that observational data from families is closer to the reality of the participants given that parents cannot hide their actual behaviour (Kerig & Lindahl, 2001). Thus, one of the main strengths of the present study remains its robust methodological approach with the inclusion of quantitative and qualitative data of varying nature.

Whose ‘voice’?

The methodological approach was sensitive to the consideration of both parental and adolescent perspectives to gain a better and perhaps more accurate understanding of parenting from multiple viewpoints of family members. Research investigating parenting from the perspective of the mother, father as well as the adolescent is scant (Hair et al., 2009; Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009; Mikelson, 2008). In fact, little is known about adolescents’ perceptions of their parents’ parenting behaviours when the impact of parenting on young people is often influenced by their own interpretations of their experience of being parented (Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2006). Furthermore, as much as there is a growing interest in studying early adolescents in family research (Mathieson, 2000; Putnick et al., 2010; Sheldon, 2015), young adolescent only-children in the UK have not been previously researched. Mancillas (2006) drew considerable attention to the importance of considering the subjective experiences of being an onlie as these children are in the best position to share their own.

Additionally, whilst parenting research based on mothers’ self-reports is widespread, the inclusion of fathers in parenting research with a focus on adolescent development is not (Symeou & Georgiou, 2017). The present research is also one of the few studies that used joint parent interviews to explore parenting in single-child families through a qualitative lens. Data from fathers in one-child families is extremely valuable to fill in gaps in knowledge pertaining to fathers’ parenting (Pedro et al., 2012; Winsler, Madigan, & Aquilino, 2005; Berkien, Louwerse, Verhulst, & Ende, 2012; Symeou & Georgiou, 2017) while considering the changing roles of fathers in today’s society (Winsler, Madigan, & Aquilino, 2005).

9.3.2 Limitations including methodological issues

It was initially planned that single-child families would only be compared with two-child families for more homogeneity as a comparison group hence minimising the influence of number of children as a confounding variable, but such was not possible. Recruitment of families to the study was extremely time consuming. Although some two-child families were successfully recruited in both the quantitative and qualitative phases the sample size was still small. This led to the decision of also recruiting families with more than two children. As a result of the recruitment process proving to be much more challenging than anticipated, the overall quantitative sample size was not as large as planned at the start of this research (i.e. 200 – 300 participants in each group). Recruitment difficulties also resulted in non-equal numbers of participants across the three groups. Furthermore, it was not possible to examine the correlation between parent survey reports and child survey self-reports on joint SDQ measures given that participants were not necessarily from the same family.

A very low response rate to the Stephenson Multigroup Acculturation Scale (SMAS; Stephenson, 2000) was recorded which led to the omission of this questionnaire in the analysis. The vast majority of both the quantitative and qualitative sample in this study was born in the UK, and for the interviews was mainly Caucasian and middle class. Hence, it does not reflect the demographic profile of the British population, with the result that cultural differences in parenting could not be explored.

Recruitment difficulties also made it difficult to match both family types on all demographic variables. However, further analysis ruled out any potential effect of the significant difference between the two family types in terms of child age. As for the significant difference between one-child and non-one child families in relation to family structure, previous research has shown that only-children often come from diverse family structures; in particular single-parent families (Blake, 1981; Polit, 1984). Thus, the sample of one-child families recruited in this study matches the diverse ‘family structure’ make-up of the population of one-child families in the UK society (ONS, 2013; 2017).

9.4 Single-child families in UK and other western societies:

Future directions for research and recommendations

Since research has shown consistently that parenting is influenced by culture, future research should recruit one-child families from a diverse cultural background to investigate whether parenting specifically in these family types differs according to parental cultural background. New research on single-child families should continue to consider the perspectives of adolescents as the best informants on parenting, along with their parents (Noller & Callan, 1990). Another approach that could complement current findings from parental joint interviews would be to include parent-child interview dyads in respect of growing attention to existing parent-teen discrepancies in family research (Taylor, Purington & Bazarova, 2018). The current study advocates for the inclusion of more fathers; in this case, to identify any influence of parent gender on the parenting of an only-child. Joint parental interviews are also highly recommended to obtain a more integrated understanding of the experience of parenting from the mother's and the father's perspectives but it would also be interesting to compare the views of mothers with those of fathers.

New research should explore the impact of other phases of adolescence on parenting and wellbeing in one-child families. Parents tend to have less influence on their child as they progress through the different stages of adolescence (Sameroff, 2010) and age may limit differences in developmental outcomes between onlies and children with siblings (Falbo, 1982). New studies on single-child families should consider exploring parental wellbeing to test the hypothesis that parents of only-children also enjoy a positive subjective wellbeing. Smith, Fuentes and Hadden (2018) drew attention to the need for further examination of parental wellbeing in accordance with the self-determination theory which revolves around three specific parenting needs: competence, autonomy and relatedness.

The present study is one of the very few which has used the AMCIES scale with fathers. There is evidence pointing towards the influence of parent gender on sensitivity based on observation data (e.g. Hallers-Haalboom et al., 2014) so future studies should also further examine whether parent gender

influences parent-adolescent interactions in single-child families using a much larger sample of fathers. Furthermore, in the current study the AMCIES scale was tested on healthy families and findings were mostly non-significant. New studies assessing parent-child interactions in samples with no underlying mental health issues should employ an observational scale that is adapted to examine subtle differences in parent-child interactions in what could be termed as *normal/typical* families.

There is a pressing need for more qualitative research on this family type in the UK. Phoenix and Husain (2007) emphasised that there seems to be limited qualitative investigations of parenting *styles* with the latter being mostly quantitatively researched whereas as far as parenting *practices* are concerned, these tend to be mostly under the microscope of qualitative researchers. Qualitative research on only-children has valuable implications as emphasised here:

“I believe that qualitative research into the real lived experience of only-children may in fact serve as something of a corrective to the prevalence of stereotypes” (Fletcher, 2014, p. 51).

The use of semi-structured interviews in this study helped shed light on child-centred parenting which is widely under-researched although on the rise in western societies (Eurochild, 2010). Child-centred parenting is yet to be operationalised as a specific parenting dimension (Hoffman, 2013), so future research should develop and test a validated scale of child-centred parenting. Some further important questions can be raised based on current findings: is child-centred parenting mostly characteristic of all families in western contemporary societies? What are the mechanisms underlying child-centred parenting in single-child families? And, what is the effect of this type of parenting on only-children including adolescent only-children?

9.5 Overall conclusions

To date, no research has yet identified and associated one common parenting style to single-child families. This study has shown that despite concerns, only children are not disadvantaged. In fact, they might even be at an

advantage on some levels and have high levels of wellbeing and, positive peer relationships. Findings show the important role played by friends in the life of adolescent only-children. For some, their friends were ‘substitute siblings’. This may have moderated the impact of the only-child status on the wellbeing of the adolescents in early adolescence.

Concerns about single-child families and parenthood have long been debated in academic and non-academic arenas. Although there were some differences in parenting and parent-adolescent relationships between single-child and multiple-children families, overall there were equally many similarities between the two groups. Primarily, adolescent only children shared as *positive* a relationship with their parents as adolescents with siblings similar to their relationship with peers. Taking these main findings into consideration, it is safe to conclude that these adolescent only-children were not shown to be particularly disadvantaged.

What is the place of one-child families in the UK? Sorensen (2006) noted that unlike in US where one-child families are perceived mostly in a positive light, this family type does not necessarily carry a positive connotation in Britain. This was confirmed in the current study when NSCF parents made it clear that they made an active choice *not* to form a single-child family. That said, findings from this study strongly challenge the negative stereotyping of this family type. For instance, family type does not negatively influence adolescent wellbeing but rather carries a positive effect (e.g. higher self-compassion and less difficulties amongst OC than NOC with no differences between the two groups on the remaining wellbeing measures).

Recently a lot of attention has been paid to the importance of accounting for the number of children in families in parenting research. The International Association for Relationship Research (2018) is currently raising questions about the influence of number of children on parent-child relationships. It is now being strongly speculated that having only one child versus more could have an impact on parent-child relationships. Although the present study successfully provided a first understanding of this aspect of the parent-only-child relationship in a UK context, findings necessitate further empirical investigation.

In conclusion, despite findings from the current study mostly portraying a *reassuring* and positive picture of single-child families in UK, it remains a difficult decision for families to decide whether to have just one child or more. A meta-analysis on parenthood and happiness by Hansen (2012, p. 29) concluded that people are actually “better off without having children” which sharply contradicts common beliefs that parenthood assures a more meaningful, rewarding, fulfilling, and less lonely life than childlessness. Whilst this finding would certainly elicit considerable debate amongst academics and parents themselves, findings from the current study (mostly positive and in favour of only-children) seem to raise a new question for families of tomorrow: could it not be just as good to have one child to enjoy the experience of parenthood while also having more ‘me-time’?

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APPENDICES

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APPENDIX 1

Participants Needed



Are you a parent of a teenager?

To all mums and dads of teenage children,

I am a PhD Psychology student at Warwick University and I am currently **researching parenting of single-child and two-child families in the UK**. We are interested in seeing how families today get on, and how families with one child compare with those with more than one, so your help would be really valuable.

I am looking for **families with children aged 11-14** to take part by both the teenager and their parents completing some online questionnaires.

All responses are anonymous and confidential, and it should only take around 30 minutes for each of you to fill in the questionnaires.

The survey and some more information about this research can be accessed by clicking on the following link:

<https://goo.gl/teoYzH>

All parents who complete the survey will have a chance to win **3 x £50 LEISURE GIFT VOUCHERS** and as for the teenagers, they will have a chance to win **2 x £50 HIGH STREET GIFT VOUCHERS**

Also, the **first 15 families** with an only child aged 11- 14 **AND** the **first 15 families** with a child aged 11- 14 (who has a sister/brother) that sign up for the interview (by emailing me) will receive a **£20 leisure voucher on the day of the interview** and be included in the prize draws for the completed surveys.

If you'd like to ask me any questions before completing this survey please do get in touch via my details below.

Thank you for your time.

Ameerah Khadaroo (Supervisor: Dr Fiona MacCallum)

University of Warwick, Department of Psychology, Coventry, CV4 7AL

Email: a.khadaroo@warwick.ac.uk



Participants Needed



Are you a parent of an adolescent ONLY CHILD?

I am a PhD Psychology student and I am currently researching parenting of single-child and multiple-children families in the UK. We are interested in seeing how families today get on, and how families with one child compare with those with more than one.

At the moment I am specifically looking for **families with an ONLY CHILD aged 11-14** to take part in a quick 1 hour family interview involving both the teenager and their parents. All responses are anonymous and confidential, and each family who signs up for the interview will receive **leisure gift vouchers as a thank you gift** on the day of the interview. Also, I am more than happy to conduct the interview at a place most convenient to you (e.g., your home) and when best suits you.

If you'd like to get in touch and/or ask any questions please do not hesitate to contact Ameerah Khadaroo via her details below.

Thank you for your time.

Ameerah Khadaroo (Supervisor: Dr Fiona MacCallum)

University of Warwick, Department of Psychology, Coventry, CV4 7AL

Email: a.khadaroo@warwick.ac.uk

APPENDIX 2

Demographic Sheet

Parental measures

We would be very grateful if you could fill in some details about yourself and your family below.

This information is **confidential** and will **only** be used to have a general overview of your background and your family context for the purpose of this study.

What is your age range?

21 and under	22 to 34	35 to 44	45 to 54	55 to 64	65 and over
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What is your gender?

Male	Female
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How many children do you have?

.....

How old is your child who is of relevance to this study?

11	12	13	14
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What is the gender of this child?

Male	Female
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Which family type best describes your family?

☐ Two-parent (both biological parents)

- ☐ Two-parent (biological + step-parent)
- ☐ Single parent (never married)
- ☐ Single parent (separated, divorced, widowed)
- ☐ Other (please describe)

How do you describe yourself? (please check the one option that best describes you)

- ☐ White/Caucasian
- ☐ Black/ African/Caribbean/Black British
- ☐ Asian/Asian British
- ☐ Other ethnic group (please describe)

What is the highest level of education/qualification that you have obtained?

- ☐ No formal education
- ☐ GCSE
- ☐ A Level
- ☐ Vocational training
- ☐ Undergrad
- ☐ Masters
- ☐ Doctorate/PhD
- ☐ Other (please describe)

Demographic Sheet

Child measures

It would be great if you could fill in some details about yourself and your family below.

This information is **confidential** and will **only** be used to have a general overview of your background and your family context for the purpose of this study.

How old are you?

- | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

What is your gender?

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Male | Female |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Which adults live with you??

- ☐ Two parents (both biological parents)
- ☐ Two parents (mum + step-dad)
- ☐ Two parents (dad + step-mum)
- ☐ Just mum (never married)
- ☐ Just mum (separated, divorced, widowed)
- ☐ Just dad (never married)
- ☐ Just dad (separated, divorced, widowed)
- ☐ Other (please describe)

How many brothers do you have?

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 0 | 1 |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

How many sisters do you have?

0

☐

1

☐

How do you describe yourself? (please check the one option that best describes you)

☐

White/Caucasian

☐

Black/ African/Caribbean/Black British

☐

Asian/Asian British

☐

Other ethnic group (please describe)

APPENDIX 3

PARENTING STYLES & DIMENSIONS QUESTIONNAIRE – SHORT VERSION (PSDQ-Short Version)

Please read each item on the questionnaire and think about how often you exhibit this behavior and choose one answer to each question.

I EXHIBIT THIS BEHAVIOR:

- 1 = Never
- 2 = Once In Awhile
- 3 = About Half of the Time
- 4 = Very Often
- 5 = Always

- _____ 1. I am responsive to my child's feelings and needs.
- _____ 2. I use physical punishment as a way of disciplining my child.
- _____ 3. I take my child's desires into account before asking him/her to do something.
- _____ 4. When my child asks why he/she has to conform, I state: because I said so, or I am your parent and I want you to.
- _____ 5. I explain to my child how I feel about the child's good and bad behavior.
- _____ 6. I spank when my child is disobedient.
- _____ 7. I encourage my child to talk about his/her troubles.
- _____ 8. I find it difficult to discipline my child.
- _____ 9. I encourage my child to freely express (himself)/(herself) even when disagreeing with me.

- _____ 10. I punish by taking privileges away from my child with little if any explanations.
- _____ 11. I emphasize the reasons for rules.
- _____ 12. I give comfort and understanding when my child is upset.
- _____ 13. I yell or shout when my child misbehaves.
- _____ 14. I give praise when my child is good.
- _____ 15. I give into my child when the child causes a commotion about something.
- _____ 16. I explode in anger towards my child.
- _____ 17. I threaten my child with punishment more often than actually giving it.
- _____ 18. I take into account my child's preferences in making plans for the family.
- _____ 19. I grab my child when being disobedient.
- _____ 20. I state punishments to my child and do not actually do them.
- _____ 21. I show respect for my child's opinions by encouraging my child to express them.
- _____ 22. I allow my child to give input into family rules.
- _____ 23. I scold and criticize to make my child improve.
- _____ 24. I spoil my child.
- _____ 25. I give my child reasons why rules should be obeyed.
- _____ 26. I use threats as punishment with little or no justification.
- _____ 27. I have warm and intimate times together with my child.
- _____ 28. I punish by putting my child off somewhere alone with little if any explanations.

- _____ 29. I help my child to understand the impact of behavior by encouraging my child to talk about the consequences of his/her own actions.
- _____ 30. I scold or criticize when my child's behavior doesn't meet my expectations.
- _____ 31. I explain the consequences of the child's behavior.
- _____ 32. I slap my child when the child misbehaves.

Online survey format:

WARWICK

We will now move on to a list of questions about you and your child.

The first questionnaire below is designed to measure *how often* you exhibit certain behaviors towards your child [in the 11-14 age group].

Please read each item on the questionnaire and think about *how often* you exhibit this behavior and choose one answer to each question by clicking on it.

	Never = 1	Once In Awhile = 2	About Half of the Time = 3	Very Often = 4	Always = 5
1. I am responsive to my child's feelings and needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. I use physical punishment as a way of disciplining my child.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I take my child's desires into account before asking him/her to do something.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. When my child asks why he/she has to conform, I state: because I said so, or I am your parent and I want you to.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I explain to my child how I feel about the child's good and bad behavior.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. I spank when my child is disobedient.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

APPENDIX 4

PARENTS OF ADOLESCENTS SEPARATION ANXIETY SCALE: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS OF TEENAGERS

The following statements represent matters of interest and concern to parents. Not all people feel the same way about them. Answer the statements as you are feeling now or think you will feel in the near future as your child grows older. Read each statement carefully and circle the number below the item which most closely reflects YOUR degree of agreement or disagreement. Try to answer all statements without skipping items or looking back. Answer all the items without discussing any of them with anyone.

- | | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Strongly | Somewhat | Neither Agree | Somewhat | Strongly |
| Disagree | Disagree | Nor Disagree | Agree | Agree |
- 1. I am happy when my teenager relies on me for advice about decisions.
- 2. It will be a sense of relief for me when my teenager moves out of the house permanently.
- 3. It hurts my feelings when my teenager takes his/her problems to a good friend instead of me.
- 4. I like knowing that my teenager will come to me when he/she feels upset.
- 5. I can't wait for my teenager to leave home for good.
- 6. I feel most content when I know my child is sleeping under my roof.
- 7. I feel sad because my teenager doesn't share as much as he/she used to with me.
- 8. If (When) my teenager goes away to college, I will feel depressed if he/she begins to like school better than home.
- 9. My teenager is a source of comfort for me when I'm upset.

- 10. I am relieved to know that the time will come soon when my teenager won't need me anymore.
- 11. It doesn't bother me if my teenager keeps some secrets about himself/herself from me.
- 12. I feel sad when I think that my teenager does not seem to enjoy being with me as much anymore.
- 13. I get upset when my teenager takes the advice of another adult more seriously than my advice.
- 14. I will miss seeing my teenager's belongings around the house after he/she leaves home.
- 15. Even though it's in the future, I dread the time when my teenager gets married.
- 16. I really miss holding my teenager like I did when he/she was younger.
- 17. I feel resentful when my child goes to his/her room instead of spending time with me.
- 18. I dread thinking about what my life will be like after my teenager leaves home permanently.
- 19. I am naturally better at keeping my teenager safe than any other person.
- 20. I feel relieved that my child is a teenager because I don't have to be as concerned about him/her as I used to.
- 21. I believe that my teenager misses me when he / she is away from me for a while.
- 22. I sometimes feel left out because my son/daughter has such close relationships with friends.
- 23. It makes me feel especially good if my teenager greets me with a hug.
- 24. I feel sad when I realize my teenager no longer likes to do the things that we used to enjoy doing together.

- 25. I feel good knowing that my teenager feels that he/she can call on me.
- 26. I feel very hurt if my teenager pulls away from me when I try to give him/her a hug.
- 27. Life will be so much better when my teenager leaves home for good.
- 28. I don't enjoy myself when I'm away from my teenager.
- 29. I feel uneasy about my teenager going to college because he / she won't need me as much anymore.
- 30. I would feel hurt if my teenager didn't come to me for comfort.
- 31. I feel empty inside when I think about my child leaving home for good.
- 32. I worry that my teenager won't be completely comfortable in an unfamiliar setting if I am not with him/her.
- 33. When my teenager returns after being away, I feel like giving him/her a big hug.
- 34. I would feel left out if my teenager asked for advice from another adult such as a teacher, coach, or a parent of a friend.
- 35. I resent my teenager's need for my help.

APPENDIX 5

PARENT-CHILD CONFLICT TACTICS SCALE

Children and their parents often have arguments about different things. We would like to know what you have done when your child **[in the 11-14 age group]** did something wrong or made you upset or angry and also how often you have done it.

Below you will see a list of things you might have done in the past year and I would like you to tell me whether you have done it:

						If you	
3-5						haven't done	
Once	Twice	times	6-10	11-20	More than	it in the past	
in the	in the	in the	times in	times in	20 times	year but have	This has
past	past	past	the past	the past	in the past	done it	never
year	year	year	year	year	year	before that	happened
= 1	= 2	= 3	= 4	= 5	= 6	= 7	= 0

-
- _____ 1. Explained why something was wrong.
 - _____ 2. Put him/her in "time out" (or sent to his/her room).
 - _____ 3. Gave him/her something else to do instead of what he/she was doing wrong.
 - _____ 4. Shouted, yelled, or screamed at him/her.
 - _____ 5. Swore or cursed at him/her.
 - _____ 6. Said you would send him/her away or kick him/her out of the house.
 - _____ 7. Threatened to spank or hit him/her but did not actually do it.
 - _____ 8. Took away privileges or grounded him/her.
 - _____ 9. Called him/her dumb or lazy or some other name like that.

APPENDIX 6

PARENTAL AUTHORITY QUESTIONNAIRE

The questions below are about how you feel about your family.

Please answer each item as honestly as you can. There are no right or wrong answers.

For each item, simply click the number that best reflects how you feel. For example, if you agree strongly then choose the number 5 or if you disagree strongly then choose the number 1.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly
Disagree				Agree

This set of questions relate to your **mother**:

- 1. My mother lets me get my own way.
- 2. My mother makes us conform to her way.
- 3. My mother expects that we do what she says immediately and without asking questions.
- 4. There are certain rules in our family and my mother discusses with us the need for those rules.
- 5. If I think that a family rule is wrong, my mother will discuss it with me.
- 6. My mother lets me make up my own mind about things, even if this is different from what she wants.
- 7. My mother does not let me question her decisions.
- 8. My mother directs our behaviour through talking with us and through discipline.

- 9. My mother believes that force should be used to get children to do what they are supposed to.
- 10. My mother believes that I do not have to obey rules and regulations simply because someone invented them.
- 11. I know what my mother expects of me, but I feel free to talk with her if I think she is being unreasonable.
- 12. My mother believes that wise parents will teach their kids early on who is boss in the family.
- 13. My mother does not set many guidelines and expectations for my behavior.
- 14. My mother tends to do what the kids in our family want to do.
- 15. My mother always gives us consistent direction and guidance in a way that is fair and reasonable.
- 16. My mother gets very upset if I disagree with her.
- 17. My mother does not restrict my decisions, activities and desires.
- 18. My mother lets me know what she expects of me, and if I don't do it, she punishes me.
- 19. My mother tends to let me decide most things for myself without a lot of direction from her.
- 20. My mother listens to the opinions of the children in our family, but won't decide for something simply because the children want it.
- 21. My mother does not believe that it is her job to guide and direct my behaviour.
- 22. My mother has her rules, but she will adjust to suit each child's needs.
- 23. My mother expects me to follow her rules, but she's always willing to listen to my concerns.

- 24. My mother lets me form my own view on family matters and to decide for myself what I am going to do.
- 25. My mother believes that all parents should deal with their children very strictly if kids don't do what they are supposed to do.
- 26. My mother often tells me exactly what she wants me to do and how she expects me to do it.
- 27. My mother gives me clear direction for my behaviors and activities, but she is understanding if I disagree with her.
- 28. My mother tends not to direct the behaviors, activities, and desires of the children in the family.
- 29. I know what my mother expects of me and she insists that I obey out of respect for her authority.
- 30. If my mother makes a decision that hurts me, she'll always discuss with me and admit that she's wrong.

This set of questions relate to your **father**:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly
Disagree			Agree	

- 1. My father lets me get my own way.
- 2. My father makes us conform to his way.
- 3. My father expects that we do what he says immediately and without asking questions.
- 4. There are certain rules in our family and my father discusses with us the need for those rules.
- 5. If I think that a family rule is wrong, my father will discuss it with me.

- 6. My father lets me make up my own mind about things, even if this is different from what he wants.
- 7. My father does not let me question her decisions.
- 8. My father directs our behaviour through talking with us and through discipline.
- 9. My father believes that force should be used to get children to do what they are supposed to.
- 10. My father believes that I do not have to obey rules and regulations simply because someone invented them.
- 11. I know what my father expects of me, but I feel free to talk with him if I think he is being unreasonable.
- 12. My father believes that wise parents will teach their kids early on who is boss in the family.
- 13. My father does not set many guidelines and expectations for my behavior.
- 14. My father tends to do what the kids in our family want to do.
- 15. My father always gives us consistent direction and guidance in a way that is fair and reasonable.
- 16. My father gets very upset if I disagree with him.
- 17. My father does not restrict my decisions, activities and desires.
- 18. My father lets me know what he expects of me, and if I don't do it, he punishes me.
- 19. My father tends to let me decide most things for myself without a lot of direction from him.
- 20. My father listens to the opinions of the children in our family, but won't decide for something simply because the children want it.

- 21. My father does not believe that it is his job to guide and direct my behaviour.
- 22. My father has his rules, but he will adjust to suit each child's needs.
- 23. My father expects me to follow his rules, but he's always willing to listen to my concerns.
- 24. My father lets me form my own view on family matters and to decide for myself what I am going to do.
- 25. My father believes that all parents should deal with their children very strictly if kids don't do what they are supposed to do.
- 26. My father often tells me exactly what he wants me to do and how he expects me to do it.
- 27. My father gives me clear direction for my behaviors and activities, but he is understanding if I disagree with him.
- 28. My father tends not to direct the behaviors, activities, and desires of the children in the family.
- 29. I know what my father expects of me and he insists that I obey out of respect for his authority.
- 30. If my father makes a decision that hurts me, he'll always discuss with me and admit that he's wrong.

APPENDIX 7

CHILD-PARENT RELATIONSHIP TEST (ChiP-C)

The following questions are about your relationship with your **mother** (if you have more than one mother, please refer to the one you consider the most important for you).

Please think about whether any of the following apply to your relationship (over the last five years) with your mother.

You just need to choose the answer that seems to fit best for you - there are no right or wrong answers.

Please take care not to miss any questions!

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

- 1. My mother has given me the freedom to make my own choices.
- 2. My mother has worried too much about me.
- 3. My mother's opinion has been important to me.
- 4. My mother and I have enjoyed cuddling with each other (play fighting, horse playing).
- 5. My mother has argued with me.
- 6. My mother didn't care about me.
- 7. When I needed my mother she has been there for me.
- 8. When I really wanted to do something, my mother let me do it.
- 9. My mother dreaded that something could happen to me.
- 10. My mother has told me that I'm worthless.
- 11. My mother and I have disagreed.

- 12. I have been of no importance to my mother.
- 13. I have cuddled up to my mother (leaned on her).
- 14. My mother has allowed me to decide for myself.
- 15. My mother has been very anxious about me.
- 16. My mother has rejected me.
- 17. My mother has shouted at me.
- 18. I've had the feeling my mother really loves me.
- 19. My mother has trusted my decisions.
- 20. My mother has been afraid I could be around bad company.
- 21. My mother has been an example to me.
- 22. My mother has nagged me.
- 23. My mother has helped me when I had problems with others.

To what extent do the following statements apply to you?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Barely	Partly	Nearly	Perfectly

- In some ways I am just like my mother.
- I want to become just like my mother.

The following questions are about your relationship with your **father (if you have more than one father, please refer to the one you consider the most important for you)**.

Please think about whether any of the following apply to your relationship (over the last five years) with your father.

You just need to choose the answer that seems to fit best for you - there are no right or wrong answers.

Please take care not to miss any questions!

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

- 1. My father has given me the freedom to make my own choices.
- 2. My father has worried too much about me.
- 3. My father's opinion has been important to me.
- 4. My father and I have enjoyed cuddling with each other (play fighting, horse playing).
- 5. My father has argued with me.
- 6. My father didn't care about me.
- 7. When I needed my father he has been there for me.
- 8. When I really wanted to do something, my father let me do it.
- 9. My father dreaded that something could happen to me.
- 10. My father has told me that I'm worthless.
- 11. My father and I have disagreed.
- 12. I have been of no importance to my father.
- 13. I have cuddled up to my father (leaned on her).

- 14. My father has allowed me to decide for myself.
- 15. My father has been very anxious about me.
- 16. My father has rejected me.
- 17. My father has shouted at me.
- 18. I've had the feeling my father really loves me.
- 19. My father has trusted my decisions.
- 20. My father has been afraid I could be around bad company.
- 21. My father has been an example to me.
- 22. My father has nagged me.
- 23. My father has helped me when I had problems with others.

To what extent do the following statements apply to you?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Barely	Partly	Nearly	Perfectly

- In some ways I am just like my father.
- I want to become just like my father.

APPENDIX 8

SATISFACTION WITH LIFE SCALE (SWLS)

Diener, Emmons, Larson & Griffin (1985)

Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree.

Using the 1-7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item and put an 'x' in the place you think that suits you most.

		Stron gly Dis- agree	Dis- agree	Slightly Dis- agree	Neither Agree Nor Dis- agree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	In most ways my life is close to my ideal.							
2	The conditions of my life are excellent.							
3	I am satisfied with my life.							
4	So far I have gotten the important							

	things I want in life.							
5	If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.							

APPENDIX 9

SELF-COMPASSION SCALE–Short Form (SCS–SF)

HOW I TYPICALLY ACT TOWARDS MYSELF IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Please read each statement carefully before answering. To the left of each item, indicate how often you behave in the stated manner, using the following scale:

**Almost
never**

1

2

3

4

**Almost
always**

5

_____ 1. When I fail at something important to me I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy.

_____ 2. I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.

_____ 3. When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation.

_____ 4. When I'm feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am.

_____ 5. I try to see my failings as part of the human condition.

_____ 6. When I'm going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need.

_____ 7. When something upsets me I try to keep my emotions in balance.

- _____ 8. When I fail at something that's important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure.
- _____ 9. When I'm feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that's wrong.
- _____ 10. When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people.
- _____ 11. I'm disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies.
- _____ 12. I'm intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.

Reference: Raes, F., Pommier, E., Neff, K. D., & Van Gucht, D. (2011). Construction and factorial validation of a short form of the Self-Compassion Scale. *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 18, 250-255.

APPENDIX 10

SELF-PERCEPTION PROFILE FOR ADOLESCENTS (Harter, 1988)

Each question talks about two kinds of teenagers, and we want to know which teenagers are most like you.

There are no right or wrong answers. Since teenagers are very different from one another, each of you completing this survey will be putting down something different.

Instructions:

So, for each question decide whether you are more like the teenager on the LEFT SIDE **or** on the RIGHT SIDE and click the one that best describes you.

For each of these questions you will then have to decide whether that is only SORT OF TRUE for you **or** REALLY TRUE for you. Click the one that is most true for you.

Question 1

Some teenagers find it hard to make friends		For other teenagers it's pretty easy
<input type="radio"/>	BUT	<input type="radio"/>

Is the above chosen response only SORT OF TRUE for you **or** REALLY TRUE for you?

Sort of true for me

☐

Really true for me

☐

Question 2

Some teenagers are able to make really close friends		Other teenagers find it hard to make really close friends
<input type="radio"/>	BUT	<input type="radio"/>

Is the above chosen response only SORT OF TRUE for you or REALLY TRUE for you?

Sort of true for me

☐

Really true for me

☐

Question 3

Some teenagers have a lot of friends

☐

Other teenagers don't have very many
friends

☐

BUT

Is the above chosen response only SORT OF TRUE for you or REALLY TRUE for you?

Sort of true for me

☐

Really true for me

☐

Question 4

Some teenagers do have a close friend they can share secrets with		Other teenagers do not have a really close friend they can share secrets with
<input type="radio"/>	BUT	<input type="radio"/>

Is the above chosen response only SORT OF TRUE for you or REALLY TRUE for you?

Sort of true for me

☐

Really true for me

☐

Question 5

Some teenagers are very hard to like		Other teenagers are really easy to like
<input type="radio"/>	BUT	<input type="radio"/>

Is the above chosen response only SORT OF TRUE for you or REALLY TRUE for you?

Sort of true for me

☐

Really true for me

☐

Question 6

Some teenagers wish they had a really
close friend to share things with

☐

Other teenagers do have a really close
friend to share things with

☐

BUT

Is the above chosen response only SORT OF TRUE for you or REALLY TRUE for you?

Sort of true for me

☐

Really true for me

☐

Question 7

Some teenagers are popular with others their age		Other teenagers are not very popular
<input type="radio"/>	BUT	<input type="radio"/>

Is the above chosen response only SORT OF TRUE for you **or** REALLY TRUE for you?

Sort of true for me

☐

Really true for me

☐

Question 8

Some teenagers find it hard to make friends they can really trust		Other teenagers are able to make close friends they can really trust
<input type="radio"/>	BUT	<input type="radio"/>

Is the above chosen response only SORT OF TRUE for you or REALLY TRUE for you?

Sort of true for me

☐

Really true for me

☐

Question 9

Some teenagers feel that they are
socially accepted

☐

BUT

Other teenagers wished that more
people their age accepted them

☐

Is the above chosen response only SORT OF TRUE for you or REALLY TRUE for you?

Sort of true for me

☐

Really true for me

☐

Question 10

Some teenagers don't have a friend that
is close enough to share really personal
thoughts with

☐

BUT

Other teenagers do have a close friend
that they can share personal thoughts
and feelings with

☐

Is the above chosen response only SORT OF TRUE for you or REALLY TRUE for you?

Sort of true for me

☐

Really true for me

☐

APPENDIX 11

STRENGTHS AND DIFFICULTIES QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ADOLESCENTS

Q16

⚙️

For each item, please click the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True.

It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain or the item seems daft!

Please give your answers on the basis of how things have been for you over the last six months.

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
1. I try to be nice to other people. I care about their feelings.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. I am restless, I cannot stay still for long.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I get a lot of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I usually share with others (food, games, pens etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I get very angry and often lose my temper.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. I am usually on my own. I generally play alone or keep to myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. I usually do as I am told.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. I worry a lot.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. I am helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q17

⚙️

20. I often volunteer to help others (parents, teachers, children).

21. I think before I do things.

22. I take things that are not mine from home, school or elsewhere.

23. I get on better with adults than with people my own age

24. I have many fears, I am easily scared.

25. I finish the work I'm doing. My attention is good.

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q17

⚙️

Do you have any other comments or concerns?

☐

Q18 Overall, do you think that you have difficulties in one or more of the following areas:
Emotions, concentration, behaviour or being able to get on with other people?

No

Yes - Minor difficulties

Yes - Definite difficulties

Yes - Severe difficulties

Condition: No Is Selected. Skip To: End of Block.

Options ▾

☐

Q19 If you have answered "Yes", please answer the following questions about these difficulties:

☐

Q20 How long have these difficulties been present?

Less than a month

1-5 months

6-12 months

Over a year

☐

Q21 Do the difficulties upset or distress you?

Not at all

Only a little

Quite a lot

A great deal

☐

Q22 Do the difficulties interfere with your everyday life in the following areas?

	Not at all	Only a little	Quite a lot	A great deal
HOME LIFE	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
FRIENDSHIPS	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
CLASSROOM LEARNING	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
LEISURE ACTIVITIES	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>

Carry Forward Choices

All Choices - Displayed & Hidden from "Do the difficulties upset or distress you?"

▾

☐

Q23 Do the difficulties make it harder for those around you (family, friends, teachers, etc.)?

» Not at all

» Only a little

» Quite a lot

» A great deal

APPENDIX 12

STRENGTHS AND DIFFICULTIES QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS

☐ Q65

Below you will see a list of items about your "teenager's" [in the 11-14 age group] behaviours, feelings and relationship with others.

For each item, please click the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True.

It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain or the item seems daft!

Please give your answers on the basis of the child's behaviour over the last six months.

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
1. Considerate of other people's feelings.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Shares readily with other children (treats, toys, pencils etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Often has temper tantrums or hot tempers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Rather solitary, tends to play alone.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Generally obedient, usually does what adults request.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. Many worries, often seems worried.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Constantly fidgeting or squirming.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. Has at least one good friend.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. Often fights with other children or bullies them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. Often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. Generally liked by other children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. Easily distracted, concentration wanders.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. Nervous or clingy in new situations, easily loses confidence.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. Kind to younger children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18. Often lies or cheats.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19. Picked on or bullied by other children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20. Often volunteers to help others (parents, teachers, other children).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21. Thinks things out before acting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22. Steals from home, school or elsewhere.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
23. Gets on better with adults than with other children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24. Many fears, easily scared.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
25. Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

☐ Q66

Do you have any other comments or concerns?

☐ Q67

Overall, do you think that your child has difficulties in one or more of the following areas:

emotions, concentration, behaviour or being able to get on with other people?

No

Yes - Minor difficulties

Yes - Definite difficulties

Yes - Severe difficulties

Condition: No Is Selected. Skip To: End of Block.

Options ▾

☐ Q68

If you have answered "Yes", please answer the following questions about these difficulties:

☐ Q69

How long have these difficulties been present?

Less than a month

1-5 months

6-12 months

Over a year

☐ Q70

Do the difficulties upset or distress your child?

Not at all

Only a little

Quite a lot

A great deal

☐ Q71

Do the difficulties interfere with your child's everyday life in the following areas?

	Not at all	Only a little	Quite a lot	A great deal
HOME LIFE				
FRIENDSHIPS				
CLASSROOM LEARNING				
LEISURE ACTIVITIES				

Carry Forward Choices

All Choices - Displayed & Hidden from "Do the difficulties upset or distress your child?"

▾

☐ Q72

Do the difficulties put a burden on you or the family as a whole?

Not at all

Only a little

Quite a lot

A great deal

APPENDIX 13

Scoring sheet for AMCIES

(Please refer to the AMCIES instruction manual for scoring guidelines)

Participant ID number.....

Coder.....

Date coded.....

Quality of drawing

From low to high PW1 PW2 PW3 PW4 PW5

Duration

New starts (frequency) Mother..... Child.....

Take over of dial (frequency) Mother..... Child.....

MOTHER / FATHER

Score

1. Verbal control - Controlling directive behaviour (score frequency of directive vocalisations)

(score frequency of general phrases – non directive. Use to compare with directive vocalisations to provide proportions)

2. Non-verbal control (take duration and frequency into consideration)

☐

3. Motherly criticism (score frequency of criticisms)

☐

4. Motherly Sensitivity

☐

5. Rough physical handling (score frequency)

☐

6. Mother dissatisfaction (with her own performance – score frequency)

☐

7. Mother satisfaction (rates self positively - score frequency)

☐

8. Mothers emotional condition (happiness/irritability levels)

☐

9. Vocalisation by mother (score frequency of vocalisations throughout duration of the task)

CHILD

Score

10. Child's dissatisfaction (with child's own performance - frequency)

11. Child's satisfaction/positive self-rating (rates self positively - score frequency)

12. Child's emotional condition (happiness/irritability levels)

13. Child's criticism of mother (score frequency of criticisms)

14. Child's persistence/attention (how engaged, how much perseverance with task)

15. Child's level of activity (3=normal stillness)

☐

16. Child's readiness for social interaction

☐

17. Child's vocalisation (frequency of vocalisations - % of time talking throughout the task)

☐

INTERACTION

18. Harmony (level of conflict/harmony throughout the task)

☐

19. Control of the interaction process

☐

APPENDIX 14

PARENTS' DUAL INTERVIEW DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Interview No:

Date:

Family CODE:

Child's gender:

Child's age:

Number of children:

No of siblings:

Parent/s who are present:

Reason why the other parent is not present (if applicable):

Family structure:	Married	Cohabiting	Divorced
	Step-family	Single-parent	

Mother's relationship with the child's father:

Father's relationship with the child's mother:

Mother's occupation:

Father's occupation:

APPENDIX 15

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Would it be OK if we now move on to the first interview... *(either with the child or the parents depending on the choice of the family members)*?

1st INTERVIEW: CHILD DESCRIPTION OF THE FAMILY DYNAMICS

First it would be nice if, in your own words, you could tell me what you are like; this is just for me to get to know you a bit better before we move on.

CAN YOU MAYBE JUST DESCRIBE YOURSELF TO ME? (*Prompt:* your personality...OR for instance, if you had to say 3 things about yourself these would be...)

Now I would like to ask some questions about your family, how you get on living together and so on.

Adolescent (15 Questions):

- What is it like to live with your **MUM**?

How do you get on with your MUM? (*Prompts:* how close do you feel to her, how affectionate you are with her, how you talk to her...)

In what ways does your mum show affection towards you? (*Prompts:* buys you gifts, hugs you, takes you out etc.) Any recent example/s?

Are there things that you and your MUM do together? Can you give a couple of examples?

- What is it like to live with your **DAD**?

How do you get on with your DAD? (*Prompts:* how close you feel to him, how affectionate you are with him, how you talk to him...)

In what ways does your dad show affection towards you? (*Prompts:* buys you gifts, hugs you, takes you out etc.) Any recent example/s?

Are there things that you and your DAD do together? Can you give a couple of examples?

- Throughout the interview I will be referring to you as the only child in your family. Would you prefer if I use the term 'only child' or 'single child'? Both mean the same.

What is it like to be an 'only child'? (*Prompt:* How do you feel about it?)

What is it like to have a brother or a sister? (*Prompt:* How do you feel about it?)

- You are an only child and many of your friends may have brothers or sisters. Do you feel that you are similar OR different to them? (*Prompts:* your character; how you get on with others; your feelings and emotions)

You have a brother or a sister and I am wondering if any of your friends is an only child? If yes, do you feel that you are similar OR different to them? (*Prompts:* your character; how you get on with others; your feelings and emotions)

- Would you say that your friends who have brothers or sisters have a similar or different relationship with their **MUM** as compared to your relationship with your MUM?

Would you say that your friends who have brothers or sisters have a similar or different relationship with their **DAD** as compared to your relationship with your DAD?

Would you say that your friends who are only children have a similar or different relationship with their **MUM** as compared to your relationship with your MUM?

Would you say that your friends who are only children have a similar or different relationship with their **DAD** as compared to your relationship with your DAD?

- Would you prefer to have had brothers and sisters? Can you explain why?

Would you prefer to have been an only child? Can you explain why?

- Are there things that you have to do in the family because you do not have a brother or sister? (**Prompts:** e.g., meet any expectations in relation to your studies, house chores, like anything in particular for them...)

As the eldest or youngest child of your family, are there things that you have to do in the family? (**Prompts:** e.g., meet any expectations in relation to your studies, house chores, like anything in particular for them...)

- Do you feel that it is better for you to be an only child? If so, can you explain in what ways?
- How much freedom do you have to do things by yourself? (**Prompt:** like to what extent would you say that you are able to make your own decisions?)
- At your age arguments with parents are sometimes inevitable. What does your **MUM** do to tell you off when you do anything that she is not too happy about? Can you provide a few examples?

How are conflicts with your MUM usually resolved?
(**Prompts:** what do you do and how does she respond?
What does she do and how do you respond?...)

- What does your **DAD** do to tell you off when you do anything that he is not too happy about? Can you provide a few examples?

How are conflicts with your DAD usually resolved?

(*Prompts:* what do you do and how does he respond? what does he do and how do you respond?...)

- If your **MUM** knows that you like something and want to have it what does she do or say about it? (*Prompts:* like a game console, a new phone, a pair of trainers that you really like, new clothing etc.).

If your **DAD** knows that you like something and want to have it what does he do or say about it? (*Prompts:* like a game console, a new phone, a pair of trainers that you really like, new clothing etc.).

- Is there anything in particular that you like to do in your spare time?

Is it something that your **MUM** encourages you to do? (*Prompts:* like asking you how you are getting on, giving you advice, buying you stuff related to your hobby etc.)

Does your **DAD** encourage or help you with that?

- Parents have to make decisions in relation to family matters (*Prompts:* where to go on holiday, simply going out, moving houses etc.). Is this something that you get to have a say in? Can you explain how and in what situations?
- Do you usually go to your **MUM** to talk about your feelings (positive and/or negative)? (*Prompts:* your hopes, disappointments, anxieties and so on about anything to do with like family matters, school stuff, friendship etc.)

Any reason why?

What about if your MUM asks you about your feelings? Do you share them with her?

Do you usually go to your **DAD** to talk about your feelings (positive and/or negative)? (*Prompts:* hopes, disappointments, anxieties and so on about anything to do with like family matters, school stuff, friendship etc.)

Any reason why?

What about if your DAD asks you about your feelings? Do you share them with him?

- What would you like to be when you grow up?

Do you think that you would like to be like your **MUM** at all?

Do you think that you would like to be like your **DAD** at all?

- Is there anything else you would like to say before we end this interview?

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR TIME!

APPENDIX 16

2nd INTERVIEW (JOINT): PARENT DESCRIPTION OF THE FAMILY DYNAMICS

So we will now start the second interview with you the dad and also you the mum of [Name] together. Again, please remember that your interview data including any personal information will be treated confidentially and you have the right to withdraw at any time during the study.

Also, you can both feel free to chip in any time you want to. OK...may I ask you the following quick questions?

So, can I ask both of you, AS THE PARENTS, how would you describe [name]? (*Prompt:* What's his/her personality like? ...)

Mother & Father (14 Questions):

- How would you describe your relationship with your son/daughter? (*Prompts:* how close you feel to your child, how physically affectionate you are with him/her, how you communicate with him/her...)
- Are there things that you do together? (*Prompts:* like playing games, doing things around the house, sharing his/her interests, going out together etc.)
- Young adolescents (including [Name]) usually have different interests/hobbies such as playing a sport, swimming, learning a musical instrument etc. How and to what extent do you get involved?

(*Prompts:* Do you like to know how he/she is getting on? Do you buy him/her any necessary equipment? Do you participate with him/her in his/her hobby?)

- Each parent has his or her own way of parenting/raising his/her child. What kind of parent would you say you are; that is, what is your approach to parenting? (**Prompts:** are you an easy going parent? are you flexible? OR are you strict? do you tend to have definite rules? Also, anything about your beliefs about adolescence that influence your parenting etc.)
- Most young teenagers sometimes misbehave (**Prompts:** not doing homework, arguing, refusing to do as they are told, sneaking out etc.). As a parent how do you try to deal with misbehaviour? Can you give a few examples of how you deal with it and in what type of situation/s?

Parents of young adolescents sometimes worry about so many different things when it comes to their child. Do you usually monitor or supervise his/her activities outside of home?

How successful have you been in establishing ground rules in relation to where s/he goes and what s/he does?

- Occasionally you may find your teenager challenging your authority (i.e. not respecting the ground rules which you have set for him/her). How do you normally deal with this? (**Prompts:** what do you do and how does he/she respond?...)
- Who is usually in charge in the family? For example, who usually makes decisions, sets the rules and plans stuff for the whole family?
- If you know that your child likes something and wants to have it what do you do or say about it? (**Prompts:** like a game console, a new phone, a pair of trainers that he/she really likes, new clothing etc.).

- When your adolescent is worried or upset (**Prompts:** perhaps because of issues relating to friendships, emotions or even the parent-adolescent relationship), do you approach her/him to talk about his/her feelings and emotions?
- If your adolescent is facing some kind of problem or difficulty, for example, school related issues, peer pressure, family difficulties, or even personal problems, how do you usually deal with this? (**Prompts:** e.g., do you seek help from others? do you try to obtain support?)
- Can you describe your aspirations and expectations for your son/daughter? (**Prompts:** like in relation to his/her education, ambitions, hopes, future goals, behaviours, etc.)

How do you try to support him/her in achieving these expectations?

- There is a lot of research looking into cultural differences in parenting and I am also trying to investigate this in my research.

So, can you maybe tell me a bit about your cultural background? (**Prompts:** values, beliefs, traditions, ethnicity...)

Do you think that this cultural background has some kind of influence on your decisions and choices that you make as a parent?

- Are there other people who help out with looking after your child other than you and your spouse?
- There is an ongoing debate over having only one child or having two or more children and the good thing is that there is NO right answer!

May I ask you if there is any particular reason as to why you have only one child? *(Please feel free to let me know if you would prefer not to say).*

Was it something that the two of you discussed?

There is an ongoing debate over having only one child or having two or more children and the good thing is that there is NO right answer!

May I ask you if there is any particular reason as to why you have two (or more) children? *(Please feel free to let me know if you would prefer not to say).*

Was it something that the two of you discussed?

➔ Is there anything else you would like to add before we end this interview?

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR TIME!

APPENDIX 17



SURVEY: Parents Information Sheet and Consent Form

The purpose of this research is to find out more about how families with only children differ from those with more than one child during the teenage years. With growing numbers of couples having only one child, this would be important and relevant not just for parents and academics, but for all those who work with children.

This research is being conducted by Ameerah Khadaroo; a PhD student in the Department of Psychology at the University of Warwick under the supervision of Dr Fiona MacCallum, an Associate Professor in the Department.

You will complete a set of questionnaires about how you feel about being a parent and how you get on with your child. Similarly, your child will answer questions about how they get on with their mum and dad and how they feel about themselves. The survey should take each person no longer than 30 minutes to complete.

You are absolutely free to choose to participate or not in this study. If you choose NOT to participate or would like to withdraw from the study you are completely free to do so (if you do choose to withdraw please let us know within two weeks of the completion of the questionnaires). We assure you that all data will be destroyed following withdrawal from the study.

Your information will be kept confidential and the surveys will not contain information that will personally identify you. All data is stored in a password protected electronic format. Results from this survey will be analysed, written up and will form part of the researcher's PhD. Papers may be submitted to relevant

journals and presented at conferences (again your contribution remains completely anonymous/no mention of your identity).

If you have any further questions concerning this research please do not hesitate to contact me on the details below.

Ameerah Khadaroo
University of Warwick
Department of Psychology
Coventry
CV4 7AL
Email: a.khadaroo@warwick.ac.uk

Please select the choice below.

Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that:

- You have read the above information.
- You voluntarily agree to participate and also give informed permission for your child [in the 11-14 age group] to participate.
- You give permission for your responses to all the questions to be recorded online.

If you and your child do NOT wish to participate in this research please decline participation by clicking on the "do not agree" button.

- ☐ We AGREE to participate
- ☐ We DO NOT AGREE to participate



INTERVIEW: Information Letter to Parents

My name is Ameerah Khadaroo and I am a PhD student in Developmental Psychology at the University of Warwick. I would like to invite you to take part in my research project.

I'm interested in looking at how parents and children get on in the early secondary school years, and especially in whether the number of children that you have makes any difference. This will be important and relevant for parents, academics, and also all those who work with children. My supervisor is Dr Fiona MacCallum, an Associate Professor in the Department who has several years' experience of working on research with families which specifically looks at parenting, and has published various papers in this area. The research has been approved by the Department of Psychology Ethics Committee.

What the study will involve:

I am looking for families with children aged 11-14 to take part in this study. I am contacting you because you took part in the online survey and showed an interest in taking part in an interview. The interview will last no more than an hour for the parents and also about an hour for the teenage child.

I will be interviewing [Name] and also both the parents together. This is just to see how [Name] relates to both of you and also how both of you relate to him/her as parents.

I'll be asking about how you get on as a family, his/her experience as an adolescent only child, how he/she gets on with others, your parenting experience and things like that.

After I have talked to each of you, you will each then be paired with your teenage child and observed in a standardised puzzle task using an Etch-a-Sketch. This is a toy used to draw pictures with two knobs; one allowing horizontal while the other

vertical lines to be drawn. The task will last no longer than 10-12 minutes for each parent.

Taking part in the study:

Your family's participation in the study is completely VOLUNTARY and you are free to withdraw at any time and without giving any reason.

Confidentiality:

There will be no way of identifying you or your family as having taken part from any reports of this study. Only the researcher and the named supervisor will have access to all the data provided by the families which will be kept in a safe place and then destroyed following the completion of the PhD project.

How will the data be used?

Data from the interviews and observations will be transcribed and coded respectively, analysed, written up and will form part of the researcher's PhD. Papers may be submitted to relevant journals and presented at conferences, but no information which could reveal your identity will be disclosed.

Contact information:

If you have any questions about this study and/or the interview including the observed task please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor:

PhD Researcher: **Ameerah Khadaroo**

Telephone number: **07982826017**

Email: a.khadaroo@warwick.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr Fiona MacCallum

Email: Fiona.MacCallum@warwick.ac.uk

Many thanks for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Ameerah Khadaroo

PhD student
 Department of Psychology
 University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL

Parents' Consent Form

<i>Exploring the parenting of single-child and two-child families in the UK and how it affects the children</i>	Please tick	
	MUM	DAD
We confirm that we have read and understood the information sheet dated [date] and all questions about the study have been answered satisfactorily.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We understand that our participation is completely voluntary and that we can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, before and during the interview and/or observation or up to two weeks after being interviewed/observed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We understand that we cannot be identified as confidentiality will be ensured by anonymizing any personal information that we provide.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We give permission for our responses to all the interview questions to be tape recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We give permission to have audio and visual recordings of the observed play task.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We give permission for the researcher and the named supervisor to have access to our data.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We understand that the research data collected will be retained for 5 years before being destroyed, in line with University requirements.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We understand that we can contact the researcher and the named supervisor at any point if there is anything that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

not clear, if we would like more information about the study, or if we were to experience distress as a result of taking part and require support.	
We agree to take part in this study.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
We wish to receive a summary of the findings when the study is completed. This can be sent to us at: Email address: OR Postal address:	YES/ NO YES/ NO

Print Name..... Mother's Signature:

Print Name..... Father's Signature.....

Name of person taking consent.....

Signature.....Date:

APPENDIX 18



SURVEY: Assent Form

My name is Ameerah Khadaroo; a PhD Psychology student at Warwick University and I would greatly appreciate your help with this survey. The purpose of this survey is to find out more about how parents and children get on in the early secondary school years, and especially whether the number of children that parents have makes any difference.

Taking the survey is voluntary, which means you do not have to take part if you don't want to. Nothing will happen to you if you decide not to take part.

If you agree to help you will complete a survey which will ask questions about you, your family, how you get on with your mum and dad and also how you feel about yourself. You do not need to put your name on the survey and your answers will be completely private. However, the data may be used in publications/conference presentations (again your contribution remains completely anonymous/no mention of your identity).

If you have any further questions concerning this research please do not hesitate to contact me on the details below.

Ameerah Khadaroo
University of Warwick
Department of Psychology
Coventry
CV4 7AL

Email: a.khadaroo@warwick.ac.uk

Please select the choice below.

Clicking on the "agree" button indicates that:

- You have read the above information.
- You voluntarily agree to take part.
- You give permission for your responses to all the questions to be recorded online.

If you do NOT wish to take part in this research please decline participation by clicking on the "do not agree" to take part button.

☐ We AGREE to participate

☐ We DO NOT AGREE to participate



INTERVIEW: Assent Form

My name is Ameerah Khadaroo; I am a PhD Psychology student at Warwick University and I would greatly appreciate if you could give me the chance to talk to you. I am trying to find out more about how parents and children get on in the early secondary school years, and especially whether the number of children that parents has makes any difference.

Taking part in this interview is voluntary, which means you do not have to participate if you don't want to. Nothing will happen to you if you decide not to take part.

If you agree to participate it will involve talking to me for about an hour. I will ask questions about you, your family, how you get on with your mum and dad and also how you feel about yourself.

All your answers will be completely confidential so I won't tell anyone else what you say. Also, there are NO right or wrong answers as we are interested in what you think. If you don't want to answer any questions just say so.

Also, after the interview you will be paired with each parent and observed in a puzzle task where you and your mum/dad will draw pictures with two dials; one dial allows you to draw horizontal lines while the other allows you to draw vertical lines. The task will last no longer than 10-12 minutes with each of your parents.

If you want to ask me any questions about the interview and/or puzzle task please feel free to contact me on the details below.

Ameerah Khadaroo

University of Warwick

Department of Psychology

Coventry

CV4 7AL

Mobile No: 07982826017

Email: a.khadaroo@warwick.ac.uk

INTERVIEW: Assent Form

<i>Exploring the parenting of single-child and two-child families in the UK and how it affects the children</i>	Please tick
I have been told all about the study and have been able to ask questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have understood the answers to any questions I have asked.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that all my answers will be kept private.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am happy for my responses to all the interview questions to be tape recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am happy to have audio and visual recordings of the observed play task.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I don't have to take part and I won't get into trouble if I decide to stop.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in this study.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Print Name:

Participant Signature:

Date:

Declaration by member of research team:

I have given a verbal and a written explanation of the research project to the participant, and have answered the participant's questions about it.

I believe that the participant understands the study and has given informed consent to participate.

Researcher's name:	
Signature:	Date:

APPENDIX 19



SURVEY: Child Debrief

Thank you for taking part in our study! Your help is greatly appreciated.

We previously informed you that the purpose of this study was to find out more about how families with only children differ from those with more than one child during the teenage years.

If while completing the survey you felt upset or would simply like to talk to someone for some form of support you can have access to some family support services that are available for children. Please see below the web link and contact number of these services should you want to contact any of them for some advice and support:

- **ChildLine (Contact No: 0800 1111)**

<http://www.childline.org.uk/Pages/Home.aspx>

- **Youth2Youth (Contact No: 020 7840 7222)**

<http://www.philiplawrenceawards.net/projects/youth2youth/>

If you have any concerns or questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me on the details below.

Ameerah Khadaroo

University of Warwick

Department of Psychology

Coventry

CV4 7AL

Email: a.khadaroo@warwick.ac.uk

IMPORTANT:

**PLEASE MAKE SURE THAT YOU CLICK THE ARROW AT THE
BOTTOM OF THIS LAST PAGE SO THAT ALL YOUR RESPONSES
ARE RECORDED BEFORE YOU EXIT.**

Once again, thank you for taking part in this study!



SURVEY: Parent Debrief

Thank you for your participation in our study! Your participation is greatly appreciated.

We previously informed you that the purpose of this study was to find out more about how families with only children differ from those with more than one child during the teenage years.

As researchers, we do not provide mental health services. However we want to provide every participant in this research an opportunity to have access to some family support services that are available, should you decide you need some advice and support at any time. Please see below the web link and contact number of these services:

- **YoungMinds Parents Helpline (Contact No: 020 7089 5050)**

http://www.youngminds.org.uk/for_parents/parent_helpline

- **ParentLine Plus (Contact No: 0808 800 2222)**

<http://www.familylives.org.uk/>

- **Relate (Contact No: 0300 100 1234)**

<http://www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-family-life-and-parenting/family-counselling>

As previously mentioned should you decide to withdraw your data from this study within the next two weeks, we assure you that all your data will be permanently deleted following your withdrawal from this research.

If you have any concerns or questions regarding this study, its purpose or procedures, or if you have a research-related issue, please do not hesitate to contact me on the details below.

Ameerah Khadaroo
University of Warwick
Department of Psychology
Coventry
CV4 7AL
Mobile No: 07982826017
Email: a.khadaroo@warwick.ac.uk

IMPORTANT:

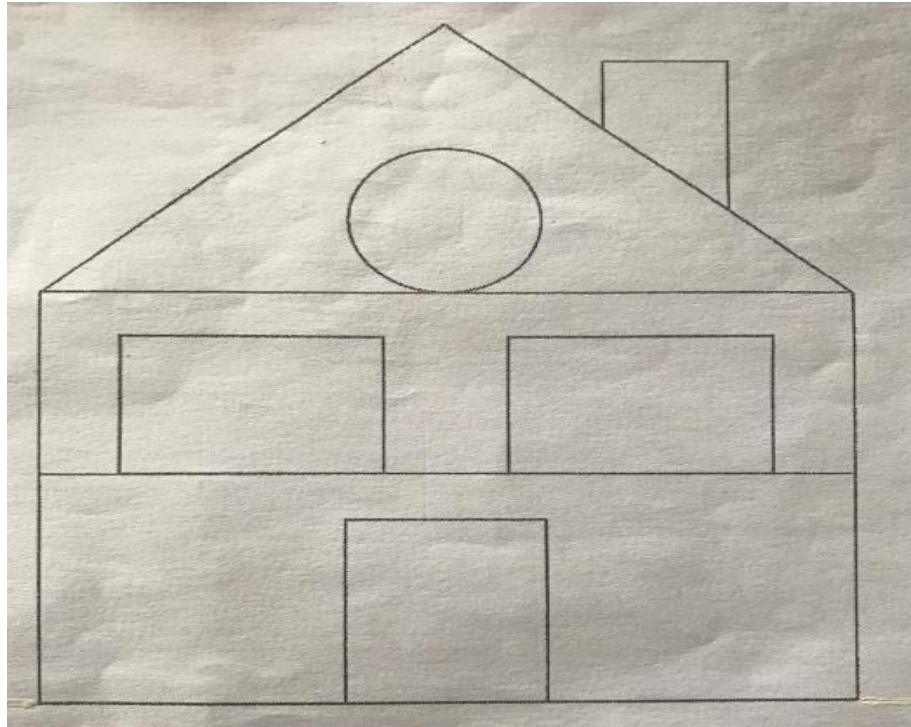
**PLEASE MAKE SURE THAT YOU CLICK THE ARROW AT THE
BOTTOM OF THIS LAST PAGE SO THAT ALL YOUR RESPONSES
ARE RECORDED BEFORE YOU EXIT.**

Once again, thank you for your participation in this study!

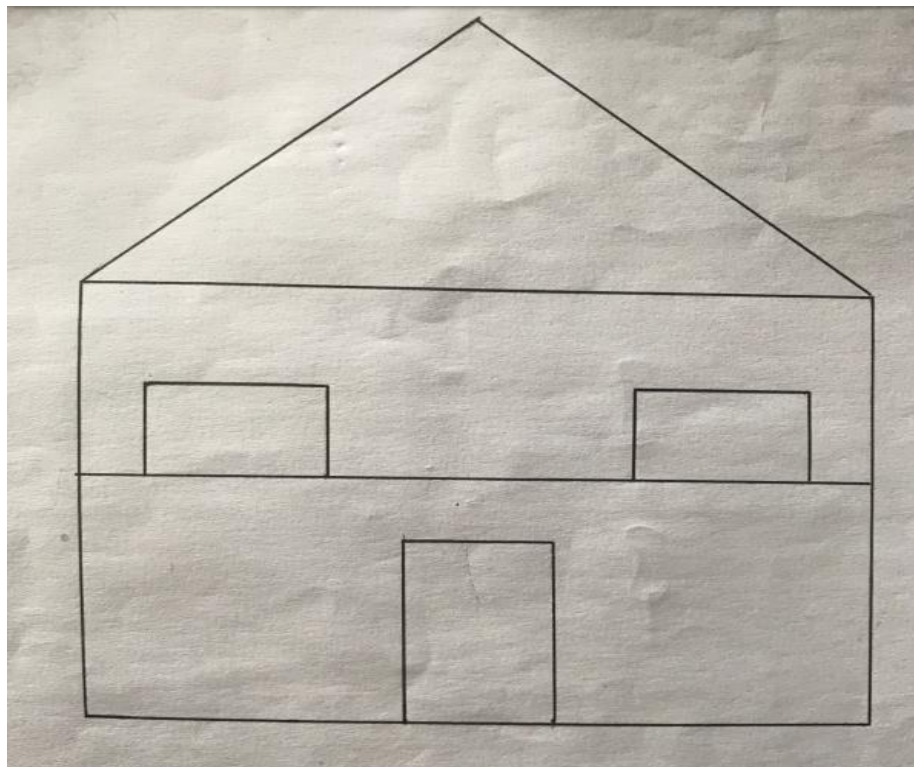
APPENDIX 20

AMCIES: House templates given to parent and adolescent

PICTURE 1:



PICTURE 2:



APPENDIX 21

DATA TRANSCRIPTION GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

Notes for transcribing

- 1) Complete each transcription in a new word document, insert page numbers and fill in the details at the top right corner
- 2) Name each word document the same as the audio file name
- 3) Don't use any names – refer to them as Parent/Child/Sibling...1, Parent/child/Sibling...2 etc. (see example of transcribed data)
- 4) If any date of births are mentioned, write them in the text but highlight them (i.e. child1 was born on **24/10/2008**)
- 5) If any personal names are used just write in brackets (names friend) etc. (see example of transcribed data)
- 6) If there is particular emphasis on a word write it in CAPITAL letters
- 7) If any participant gets upset during the interview make a note of this (see example of transcribed data)
- 8) Include all pauses, “ers” and “Erm”s – as demonstrated in the example
- 9) If parent/child laughs, put (laughs) in brackets as in example
- 10) If you are unsure about how to transcribe something then highlight this in the text, put down the exact recording time (mins & secs) and I will then look into it.

TIP: When you take breaks make a note of exactly how many minutes and seconds you are into the transcription so that you can easily find the location on the audio where you last finished

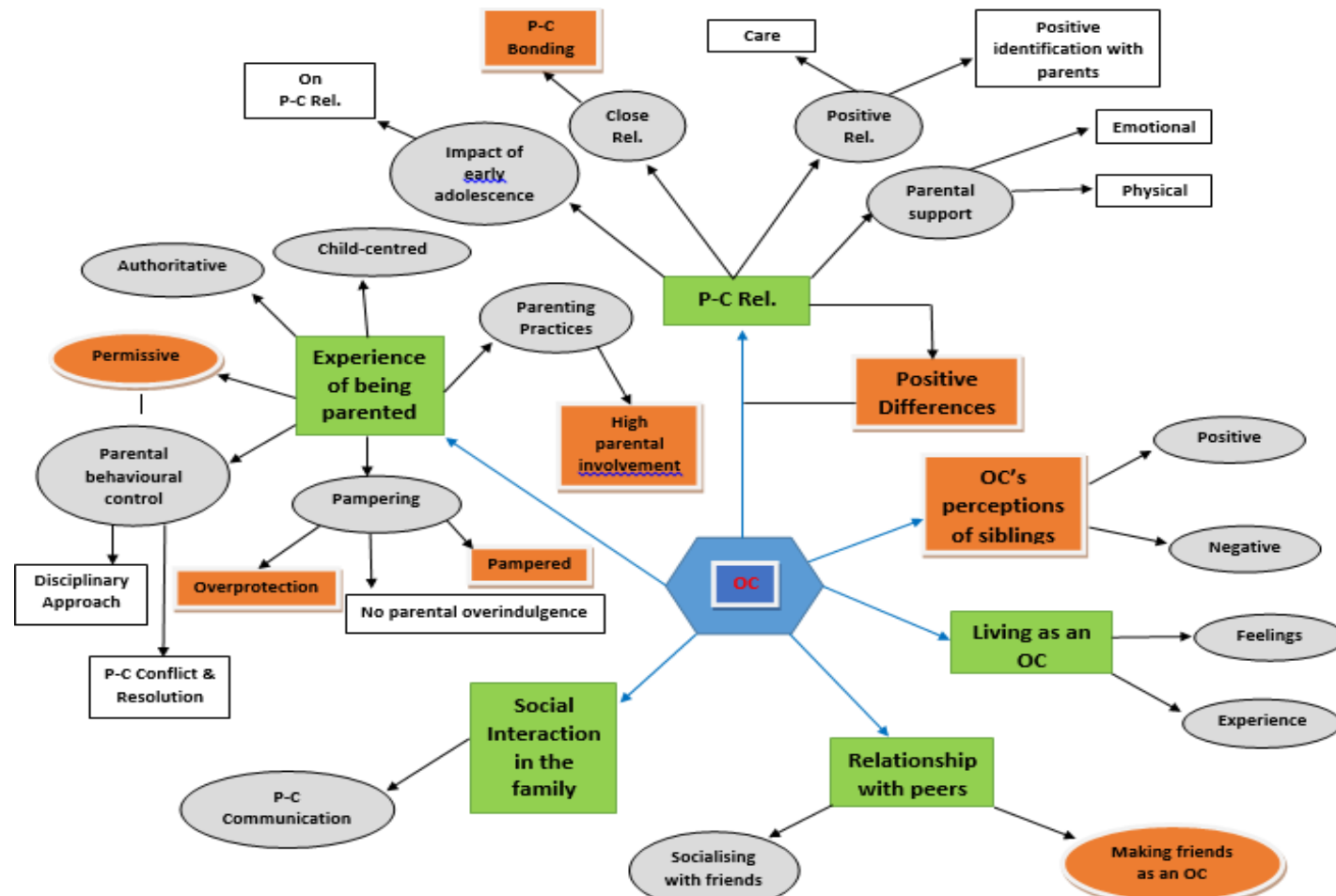
Examples of Acronyms used for the interviewees:

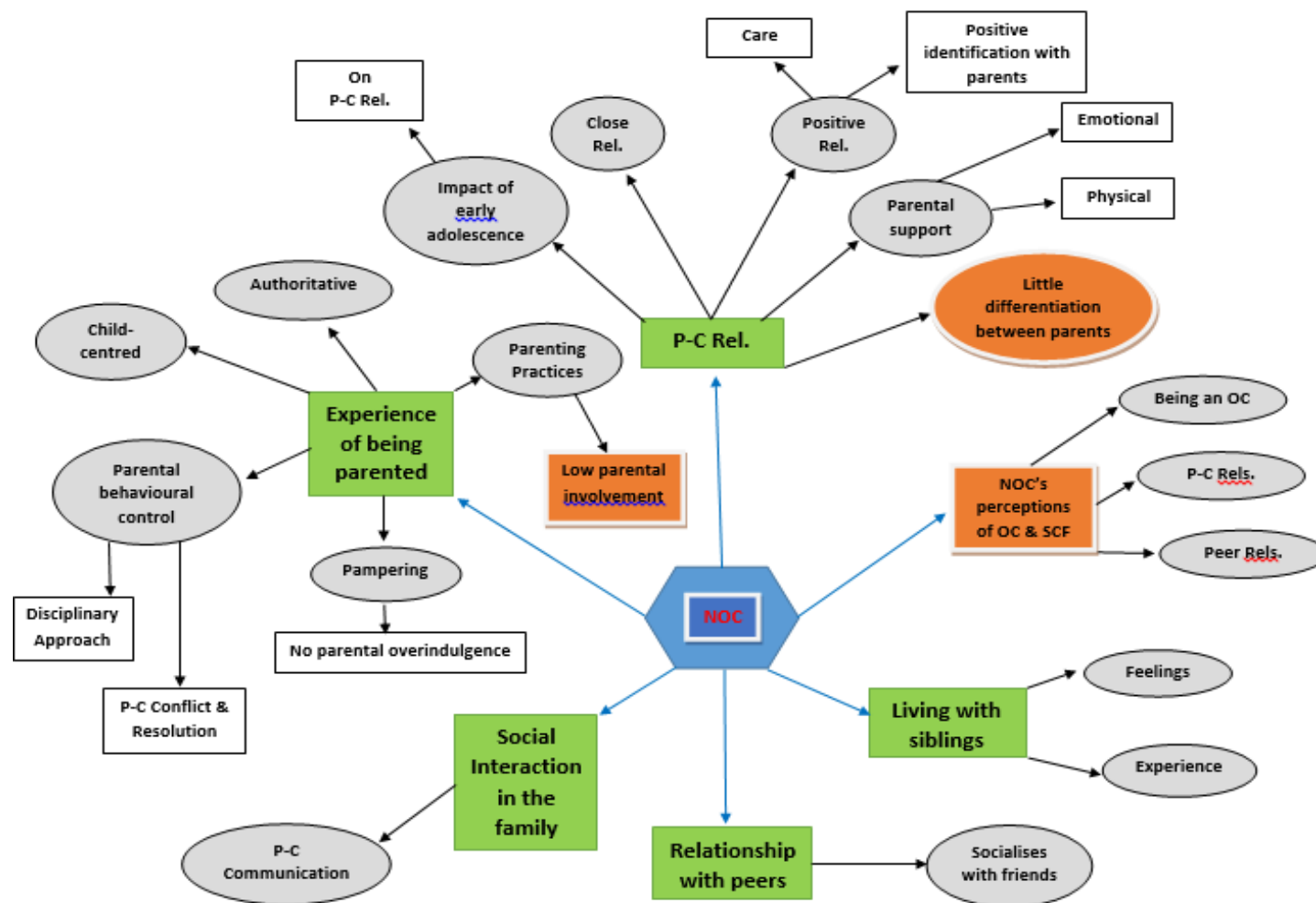
(M = Mum, D = Dad, but not applicable in example; I = Interviewer, A = Adolescent)

DATA PROTECTION

- 1) The data is highly confidential and the contents of these files must not be discussed with anyone else.
- 2) When you save the files onto your computer store them in a password protected file. NO ONE other than you should have access to this.
- 3) When complete, copy the transcribed word documents and audio files back into the password protected folder on the USB stick
- 4) Do not email any files to me. Come and see me with the USB stick (do not leave with anyone else or on my desk). I will save the files on my computer and then ask you to delete any copies that you may have.

APPENDIX 22: THEMATIC ANALYSIS MAP ADOLESCENTS





APPENDIX 23: THEMATIC ANALYSIS MAP PARENTS

